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GRIMJACK!

OSTRANDER & TRUMAN TALK

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VAL MAYERIK

BEYOND ELFQUEST!
COLLEEN DORAN & RICHARD PINI
ON A DISTANT SOIL!

AN INTERVIEW WITH INDEXER--
GEORGE OLSHEVSKY
OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE!

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S COMICS

iNTERVIEW

#15

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THE BEAST THAT LEAPS, SLEEPS & PEEPS
a/k/a the sensational snout-bitch

FLUFFY
the cat with no sense of smell

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TIMOTHY TRUMAN
pencils, inks & colors

UP FRONT

What does an editorial consultant *do*?

The astute among you have already figured out that we're talking about the fellow whose name appears just below mine on the masthead, in a box all by itself: **Jim Salicrup.**

Well, he consults on editorial matters, sure.

But it also means he's consulted by the editor — sometimes on matters that may seem to have nothing at all to do with this magazine.

Why, just the other night, Jim and I spent five hours on the telephone in a rambling, philosophical argument that I know I'm going to regret when I get the phone bill.

We've known each other for more than ten years, now — ever since we first met at Marvel, where Jim had already infiltrated by the time I got there back in early 1974. Over the past decade, but especially during those first few years, Jim has been a valuable source of insight and advice. I've learned a lot from him. His strength and support have had a major influence on me, and I value his friendship.

As regular COMICS INTERVIEW readers know, of course, Jim was instrumental in the creation of this magazine, and he continues to contribute interviews, ideas and coaching every chance he gets.

To be an editor is to make decisions. Constant decisions. Every word, every sentence, every piece of punctuation — and, most importantly, every *idea* which precedes the above — represents a decision. And one of the most important decisions an editor must make is the company he keeps — the associates he picks and chooses.

I am privileged to call **Jim Salicrup** not only a consultant, but a friend — and one of the most perceptive minds in comics.

Now, Jim, isn't this better than money!

-Dave

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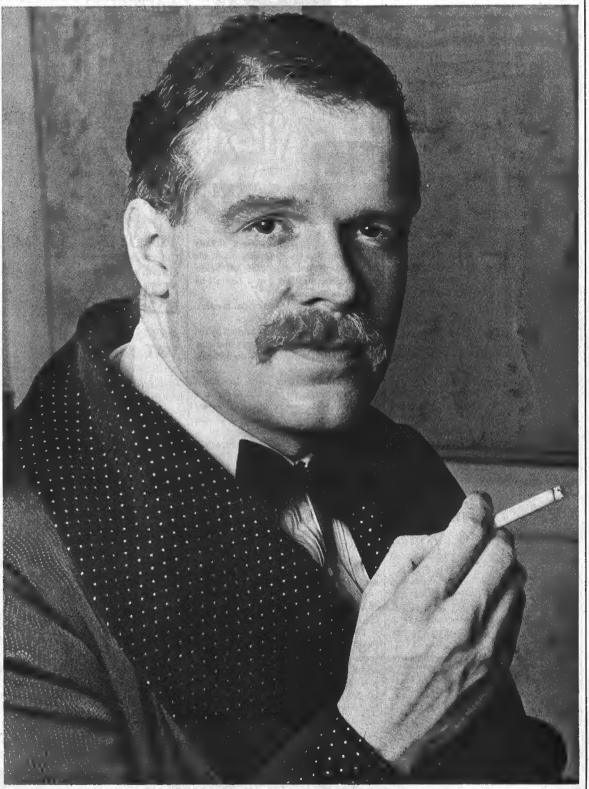
"I don't think anyone is irreplaceable —



Actor and comic-book writer John Ostrander, in character for a role on the stage.

except me with GRIMJACK." *(Laughter.)*

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JOHN OSTRANDER

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: John Ostrander

Occupation: Writer, actor, director

Born: 20 April 1949

Residence: Chicago, Illinois. I've lived here all my life.

Credits: GRIMJACK, STARSLAYER, the Sargon back-up feature in WARP, and "Munden's Bar" in GRIMJACK.

Favorite Comics: THOR, SWAMP THING, AMERICAN FLAGG, JON SABLE, JOURNEY, 2000 AD, CEREBUS and WARRIOR.

Favorite Television Shows: HILL STREET BLUES is tops. I hate to sound like a snob, but most of the TV I watch is PBS, such as ALL CREATURES GREAT AND SMALL. I'm also a pretty regular viewer of CHEERS. It's about time they did a series set in a bar. A bar is an incredibly fertile field for narrative exploration — it's a wonderful setting that just makes things happen.

Favorite Music: Hard to say, because I have eclectic musical tastes. The albums I've bought most recently include the Pretenders' LEANING TO CRAWL and the soundtrack to NICHOLAS NICKLEBY, and I enjoy the classics a lot. Sometimes I'll get whole ideas for stories or characters while listening to certain pieces of music, and I'll play that piece over and over again until the idea is clear in my mind.

Pet Peeve: We're living in an age of technological crap unparalleled since the world began. The amount of crap on TV is enormously large. Now you can get cable crap as well. *(Laughter.)*

"I want to get a little bit of the Robert E.

Cynical, mercenary and very deadly, Grimjack isn't the kind of guy who makes friends easily. However, from his first appearance in a back-up feature in First Comics' STARSLAYER, the scar-faced swords-and-gunman has won acclaim from fans and critics alike. Part science fiction, part heroic fantasy, and part hardboiled mystery, the adventures of Grimjack take him through the seamy streets and dingy alleys of Cynosure — the city where the multiverses meet — and bring the tough guy in the feathered beret up against vampires, monsters, and even scarier human beings. But Grimjack survives — which is more than you can say for most of the people (and creatures) he encounters.

Grim stuff — yet interviewer Chris Henderson found co-creator John Ostrander quite amiable and light-hearted, unlike his creation. John is obviously enjoying his success as a writer and the success of his series — which now has its own First Comic — and he affably discusses GRIMJACK's origin and future, the problems John encountered inheriting STARSLAYER from Mike Grell, the current state of comics (particularly Marvel), John's unusual DR. WHO project, and the relationship between Shakespeare and comic books. But as we go to press, Chris still hasn't persuaded John to confirm or deny the rumor of a GRIMJACK/SMURF crossover . . .

Grimjack goes to Hell. Fortunately (for Hell), it's only a dream. Splash from Chapter Four of "Buried Past" in STARSLAYER #15.

"I'M IN HELL."
"THEY SWARM OVER ME — TEETH LIKE KNIVES, SHARP AS MEMORY. THEY MELT, CO-AGULATE, AND FORM AGAIN AS MY DEAD — MY VICTIMS, MY ENEMIES. MY LOVES — AND DRAW MY LIFE FROM ME."
"THEN THE VOID SWIRLS AND EDDIES TOWARDS A POINT OF FIRE, BRIGHT AS BLOOD."
BURIED PAST
CHAPTER FOUR

CHRIS HENDERSON: *John, besides being a comics scripter, you're also a playwright. Are you writing any plays these days?*

JOHN OSTRANDER: As a matter of fact I'm working on a DR. WHO play I'm currently calling THE INHERITORS OF TIME. I've had very little time so far to write the actual script. It took me about nineteen months just to get the rights. The BBC had to approve a detailed plot synopsis. That was at my request, to make sure that I could write the script all the way through, instead of having them interrupt with: "No, no, no — you *can't* do that at all!" *(Laughter.)* But they've okayed the synopsis and now I just really have to get down to work and finish the script.

CHRIS: *Will it be very close to the television show — same characters, and so on?*

JOHN: Well, we're going with our own incarnation of the doctor, and about all I can say about the storyline is that it deals with what happens to Dr. Who after his final incarnation. We're not going to have the Daleks for various reasons, among them the fact that it's very hard to make them mobile enough to work on stage.

CHRIS: *Are you including a part for yourself?*

JOHN: I'm trying to stay away from that. I'm getting out of acting. I would like to continue directing, which I do from time to time. But my career in the theater will be much more into the writing end.

CHRIS: *Well, let's talk about writing.*

JOHN: Hey, nice segue! *(Laughter.)*

CHRIS: *Let's start with STARSLAYER, which you inherited.*

JOHN: Well, when I was first offered the assignment, I took it because I thought the character — Torin, a Celtic warrior in outer space — was interesting. I liked what **Mike Grell** was doing with him, but I kept on thinking of other interesting possibilities. One of the first things I did was call up **Grell** because I had a couple of questions about the series. For example, about the Mark IX multi-functional pistol: what are its multi-functions? And he said, "Whatever you say they are." "Okay.

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Howard approach into STARSLAYER."

Unused cover for STARSLAYER #15.
Art by Tim Truman.

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What's Tamara's last name?" "Whatever you say it is." "What are the names of the Board of Directors of Planet Earth?" "Whatever you say they are."*(Laughter.)* "Okay, Mike — I think I got the picture now." He wasn't being nasty — he was just focusing his attention on JON SABLE, and he was willing me the whole thing and giving me permission to do with it what I wanted.

On my first couple of issues, I was trying to come as close as I could to a **Grell**ian approach, because I felt at the time that I didn't want to lose **Grell**'s readers. I found out later that those people who were buying it for **Grell** didn't stay around anyway. So I've had some success now in starting to transform the character, or dig deeper into him and find out more of what makes him tick. You see, I'd never written a full-length comic book so I was kind of learning as I was going along. STARSLAYER has been a kind of on-the-job training for me. I've made my own amount of goofs, but I think overall I've done fairly well. Some stories I like a lot, such as the STARSLAYER/ GRIMJACK cross-over. I also enjoyed — it was odd, because at the time I wasn't sure of it — the second section of the Family

IN STARSTRUCK #1

YOU'LL MEET:

- GALATIA 9
- BRUCILLA "THE MUSCLE"
- EROTICA ANN
- KALIF BAJAR
- VERLOONA
- THE GALACTIC GIRL GUIDES AND
- E-V, THE ROBOT TO NAME JUST A FEW

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"I've made my own amount of goofs."

"WE HAD JUST CLEARED THE TOWER WHEN THE DROID RELAYED THE S.O.S."
COAST'S CLEAR. WE NIP DOWN THE STAIRS, OUT THE DOOR AND WE'RE AWAY.
...NOT UNTIL WE GET TAMARA AND CHRIS!

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Above and below: Grimjack teams up with Torin in STARSLAYER #18. Words by Ostrander, art by Truman.

three-parter that we did, with the car chase. I had a good time with that, and I think the readers had a good time with it.

CHRIS: *Yeah, I definitely think that's when you started to loosen up and began doing what you wanted to, rather than maintaining Mike's approach.*

JOHN: Well, I think it's important when you take something over that you at least maintain some of the elements of the characters that the other writer had and that the fans enjoyed. A too-sudden change in the character is very jarring, and inappropriate.

CHRIS: *How long do you think you'll stay with STARSLAYER?*

JOHN: Oh . . . I figure three years overall would not be a bad bet. I want to keep on as long as I can keep everything fresh and have good stories to tell. The day I can't is the day I'll go do something else. We've just started to get into some interesting areas, such as Morgan, the Celtic goddess of death. And I want to get into a little bit more of what I call the **Robert E. Howard** approach. Not that STARSLAYER is going to be Conan with an eye-patch. Basically, the **Robert E. Howard** approach, as exemplified by some of his best stories, is that he had this pell-mell quality to some of his stories — just one story element after another, jumping from the briar-patch into a fire, then into a hotter fire, and then into the oven. The character just goes nuts. And that's the quality of the character that I like best. I want to get a little bit of that into STARSLAYER.

CHRIS: *Well, at the end of the story, "Beyond the Black River," Howard — through Conan — says that barbarism is the natural state of mankind. Civilization is just a passing fancy. Is this Torin's outlook?*

WHAT THE HELL, SOUNDS LIKE ONE HELL OF A SCRAP. THINK I'LL PROTECT MY INVESTMENT.
"BESIDES, MacQUILLON REMINDED ME OF ANOTHER HARD-NOSED JACKASS I KNEW TEN YEARS BACK.
"HIS NAME WAS JOHN GAUNT."

JOHN: It might be Torin's outlook, but it's not necessarily mine. I disagree with **Howard**. I think civilization is a much more prevalent state . . . particularly in outer space. One thing we know about Torin is that he wins battles but he's lost nearly every war he's ever been in. Which was the Celtic mode, particularly toward the end of their wars with Rome. They were done in by people with higher technology. All the Celts had was bravery, guts, and an incredibly tough individual fighting style. And until the Romans came, it always served them well in terms of winning wars. So Torin fights extremely well as an individual fighter — that's his Celtic heritage. The question is, will he ever adapt to what's going on? If he ever becomes a real pain in the side to the Alpha Centurian commercial empire, they're going to bring up all their resources to crush him.

CHRIS: *Well, he's certainly kicked up a lot of dust so far. Hasn't he already done enough to anger them?*

JOHN: No, not yet. In issue #17, the Emperor — Gaius Winthrop Cser IV — tells Cal, the master computer, "Look, this manhunt just isn't cost-effective. We're using a lot of time and money that should be used elsewhere. You're going to have one more shot to get him, and then we're going to hold off for a while. Besides, these guys always hang themselves anyway."

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JOHN OSTRANDER

"I was still reading comics at age

CHRIS: *Is writing a character you inherited different from writing one you created — like GRIMJACK?*

JOHN: Well, the way I delineate it now is that I originated Grimjack but it has become the joint creation of **Tim Truman** and myself. I make a very big distinction between the two. But I did originate Grimjack, and what I find interesting about Grimjack is that I know him a lot, and I think the readers are going to get a sense that they know him but they don't know *all* about him. And I don't think we're ever going to do a real origin story. You'll learn bits and pieces of him as we go on. We now know that he's been a member of the spy organization, Cadre, and that at one point he was a member of the Trans-Dimensional Police. Those are the two major elements of his past, but they are just referred to in passing. The fact is that he's older, and he may have lost a step or two here and there, but he's gained something in experience which more than makes up for it. And that's what makes him a hell of a fighter.

CHRIS: *How long has Jack been with you?*

JOHN: I began him actually about five years ago, long before I joined First Comics. At the time, he was going to be the hero of a series of short stories. The original setting was a post-holocaust Chicago. I learned that First was looking for new proposals and shortly after I got the STARSLAYER assignment I decided, "Now's the time to hit them with something." But what could I hit them with? I had these Grimjack stories in the drawer, so I took them out, brushed them off, and decided to see if he'd make a good comic-book character.

CHRIS: *Is he sane?*

JOHN: Yeah. Very much so.

CHRIS: *By whose standards?*

JOHN: By his, and by mine.

CHRIS: *Yeah, but sanity is only judged by the civilization one lives in.*

JOHN: Well, Grimjack is perceived of as sane by those around him, otherwise people wouldn't come to him and ask him to solve their problems, which is essentially what happens in GRIMJACK stories. People hire him to do things. They hire him to do things because they expect him to be able to do them. He's got a nasty reputation. But he's fair. Tough, but fair.

CHRIS: *You say he's fair. You mean he'd never take out someone from behind?*

JOHN: No, I can't say that either. He fights to win. He has a code of honor, certainly, but he says to one character in the first issue, "I didn't get this old by being stupid." He does what he has to do to win, particularly when he's up against someone who's about two or three times his size. By "fairness" I mean that he doesn't go out picking the fight. But if you pick a fight with him, fine — then he's out to beat you.

CHRIS: *Is there anything you want to say with Grimjack?*

JOHN: Well, I'm trying to give each story a depth. I can't say that there's any one theme running throughout all of the stories. In fact, I don't think there is. Grimjack is a man of experience. For example, one thing about his life we've touched on is that for a couple of years he lived sort of an idyllic existence and learned something of magic and philosophy. His experiences did not just pass off his back. He's absorbed them. His observations about life, and what is important about life, are going to vary from issue to

On this page and opposite: characters created by Tim Truman for GRIMJACK.

Jethro Noleski of the Trans-Dimensional Police. Opposite: members of the sinister Harlequin Squad

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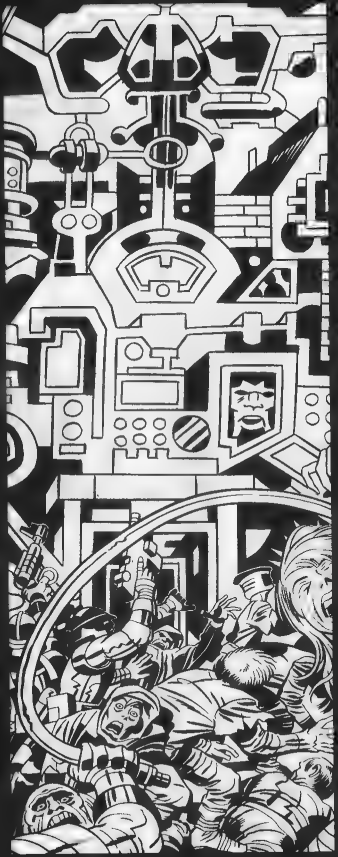
thirty-two. I felt silly buying them."



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WHEN YOUR MIND
IS A MACHINE...

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BE THE BATTLE
FOR THE STREETS.

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FOR THE SURVIVAL
OF HUMANITY ITSELF

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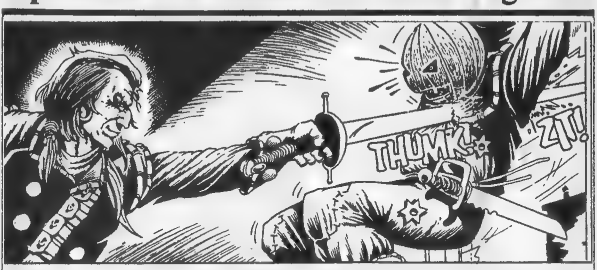
"Grimjack has gained something in experience that makes him a hell of a fighter."



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The violent world of Ostrander and Truman: Grimjack *versus* the Harlequin Squad in STARSLAYER #13 (above); and Torin the Celt strikes a blow for freedom in STARSLAYER #17 (below).

issue. For example, the story in GRIMJACK #1 is titled, "A Shade of Truth." Well, it's called that for a lot of reasons. One of them is that the story involved a ghost — a "shade." And the basic question of the story is, "What is the Truth?" and "Do we really need it?" And the suggestion is, maybe we don't.

CHRIS: *Let's talk about your background. From what I understand, you weren't out pounding the pavements, beating your head against the comic-book industry to get in —*

JOHN: No, I wasn't.

CHRIS: *— but, all of a sudden — boom! You not only ended up in comics, but now you're writing your own monthly comic, with your own character!*

JOHN: You have to keep in mind my goal. **Timothy Truman** is a man of such talent and imagination that sooner or later he was going to end up full-time in comics. That was just a given. But in my own case, it was not inevitable that I was going to wind up in comics. I've read comics for years. In fact, if anything, I probably still have a very close association with the fans, in the sense that, only about two years ago, I was little more than a fan myself. I was still reading comics at age thirty-two and felt kind of silly going into my local comic-book store and buying them. **Mike Gold** and I have been friends a long time and he's kept track of the plays that I've written over the years. And he knew of the interest that I've had in comics, and one day — when he was forming First Comics — he asked me, "How would you like to do something on speculation?" And he said they needed an eight-page back-up story in WARP, preferably about Sargon, the Mistress of War. Did I want to take a stab at it? And I said, "Sure, why not?" And I wrote up a plot synopsis, and he found flaws in it, and sent it back, and I sent him a revised one, and he said, "Okay, now do a page-by-page plot-description," and he showed me how to do that, what I should be looking to accomplish. I did that, and brought it back, and a while went by, 'til one day he called me up and said, "Guess what, John? We're buying the story and it's going to be in the back of WARP #1. Even as we speak I'm sending it to an artist." I said, "Well, isn't that wonderful!" It wasn't until after the story was fully scripted that I asked, "Do I get paid for this?" As a matter of fact, I got paid very well. So he gave me another Sargon three-parter to do, and then after that I got the STARSLAYER book. And the rest is hysteria, as they say.

CHRIS: *Are you pleased, at age 35, to be working practically full time in comics?*

JOHN: Oh, I'm ecstatic! And I'm making more money off this than I've made on anything I've done. It's like I keep on telling people — I'm not religiously poor — it just turned out that way. When you work in the theater, you tend to stay at a certain poverty level. And now, even doing two books a month, I still have plenty of time to do what I want to do and concentrate on other things, as well.— for instance, like this DR. WHO project. So it's not like I'm giving up theater. It's just that working in comics has freed up my time and as a result I've got more time to spend on myself and

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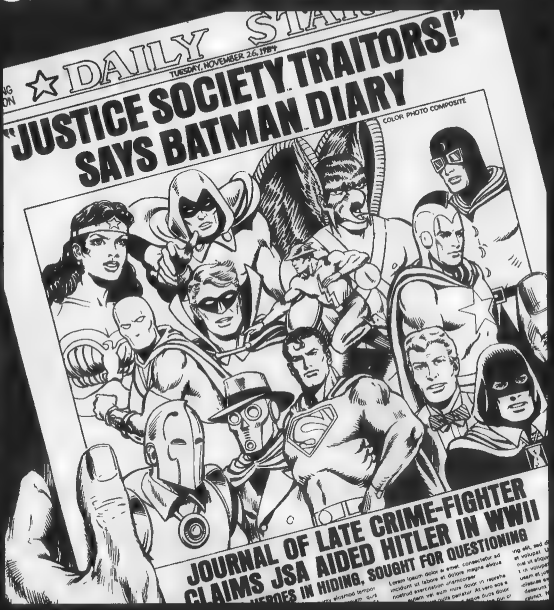
CAN IT BE TRUE?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"I've not been a big fan of Jim Shooter."

my friends. This is a good time for me. I'm enjoying it. You know, this is really a hoot! I'm very glad that I enjoy writing the stories. Maybe it has to do with synchronicity, but it's only after I started working in comics that some of my other projects started to fall into place as well. So, I needed this success in order to "prime the pump."

CHRIS: *Well, how does it feel to be a successful comic-book writer?*

JOHN: Someone wanted to know if I felt strange because I was writing comic books. And I advised them that it's not the form that is inherently good or bad. The form can be debased, or it can be pushed and explored to the fullest extent of its ability. I'm still learning how to use comic-book form. But I think that it's what you do with the form that's important, not the form itself. I've been involved with **Shakespeare** over the years, and to get a real idea of what **Shakespeare** did with the form, all you have to do is to read a couple of other plays in the same *genre* written about the same time. HAMLET, for instance, is what's known as a "blood tragedy." That was a popular form of entertainment at the time. All you have to do is read a couple of the other blood tragedies to realize how good HAMLET really is, 'cause the other ones are, for the most part, just godawful. Some of the history plays written at the same time as **Shakespeare**'s are just wretched — horrible to read! I would never want to see any of them staged! So it's **Shakespeare**'s mastery of those forms that elevates them above dreck. Or take a look at detective fiction, which has been snubbed for so many years. Now people are just starting to learn that a really good detective-story writer is making comments about society. **Robert E. Parker, Ross MacDonald, Raymond Chandler** — all of them were making comments about their societies.

CHRIS: *Often frighfully strong ones.*

JOHN: Just because they had certain elements of the detective story in their writing did not mean that their comments were invalid, or that they were any less writers. I personally think **Raymond Chandler** was a helluva stylist. The crucial thing is commitment. I was over at **Mike Gold**'s home for dinner last night, and we were talking about **John Cleese**, and how one of the reasons **Cleese** is so marvelous is just total commitment to what he's doing. We were just looking at some SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE stuff — and, in that, virtually no one is committed.

I don't think you have to get very hoity-toity about it. People say, "Yes, comics are a major art form." Well, who gives a damn whether it's an "art form" or not? When you start dealing with it as an "art form," you start getting pretentious. The question is, are you telling the story and are you telling the story well? I kind of like **Elsner**'s term "sequential artwork," or "narrative artwork," or whatever you want to call it. I can buy that. But I'm not turned off by the term "comic book," either.

CHRIS: *Some people are, because they have no understanding of what they're looking at — they can only understand the label.*

JOHN: I've got friends who didn't start looking at comic books again until I started working on them. And then I showed them not only my stuff, but AMERICAN FLAGG! and JON SABLE, and they were amazed at the metamorphosis that the field has undergone in the past ten years. In retrospect, I think years from now they're going to look back at this time as one of the really fertile times to work in the industry.

CHRIS: *Absolutely. In the early Sixties, comics were just flaccid, flabby rehashes of the same old hackneyed plots. Practically nobody had anything new to say and then Stan Lee and Jack Kirby all of a sudden made the whole industry stand up and take notice. And this little tiny nothing of a company — Marvel — became the world's greatest comics company. It is amazing to see that company now become, to many people, "the enemy."*

JOHN: It's inevitable, though — don't you think? In the early days Marvel had nothing to lose. These days it has a lot to lose. The same thing with SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE. In the early days it could do what it wanted to because nobody from the networks was paying too much attention to it. It was basically a throwaway show when it started. Now it's become a major money-maker and as a result the networks sit so tight on it that they can't recreate any of the stuff that made them so vital. Marvel's got the sales figures to prove that it's keeping its fans. It hesitates to try new things because then it could drive away fans and drive down the profit structure. They've got to answer to the Board of Directors. I've not been a real big fan of what **Jim Shooter** has done with Marvel. Now they are ostensibly trying some new things. The new Spider-Man costume is like a band-aid. They're basically applying band-aids. The question is, how much freedom does **Jim Shooter** have? You become a corporate thing. You become a prisoner of your own success. There are certain expectations. What expectations were there of First when it started? Nothing.

Chris Heyman, the feisty Free Marine (i.e., smuggler) of STARSLAYER.

John named Chris after a friend. "It fulfills a childhood fantasy of hers to be a character in comics," he says.

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"First has its sights set on Marvel and DC."

really. Now we've created certain expectations, but we're still young enough and small enough that we continue to do certain things we do. But ten years down the line, twenty years down the line, will First Comics be the same entity that it is now? I doubt it.

The thing about First is that it doesn't consider the other independents as its competition. Nobody at the office has said so, but it's my opinion that First has its sights set on Marvel and DC.

CHRIS: *Will there ever be an issue #300 of AMERICAN FLAGG?*

JOHN: Probably. I don't know whether FLAGG would work without **Howard Chaykin** at least writing it, if not drawing it. Except for MARS, I don't think there's anyone on any of the other books who's irreplaceable — except me with GRIMJACK. *(Laughter.)*

CHRIS: *We'll take your word for it. Getting back to Marvel, what do you think of Shooter's SECRET WARS?*

JOHN: Oh, God! Did you see the first issue of that? It lacks any semblance of characterization. It's just bad writing. I mean, why the introduction scene? There's not one character in that group that everyone else shouldn't know! You have to introduce Captain America to all these other heroes? The whole first issue was just the typical Marvel *cliche.* "Hello, we're a whole bunch of heroes! Now we're going to fight each other!" "Hello, we're a whole bunch of villains! *We're* going to fight each other!" Now they've done that — so the good guys are fighting the bad guys. You know it's going to make a mintful of money, 'cause it's the most hyped thing that Marvel's got. I think that issues #1 and #12 are going to be especially good sellers. I wouldn't be surprised, myself, to see the middle issues sag in sales, but my big question is, "Why twelve issues?" We have a nothing story-line to start off with. Can you see it getting any better? I mean — *twelve* issues! A four-part mini-series — *maybe.*

CHRIS: *Who knows? Maybe there's something wonderful down the road!* (Laughter.) *No one I know expects it, but —*

JOHN: Well, at least as far as our expectations, there's nowhere they can go but up with it.

CHRIS: *Yeah, maybe he'll start to learn what Wolverine's character is and start writing it correctly.*

JOHN: **Mike Gold** was asking me the other night what characters I would like to write for either of the two major companies. If I were given my "druthers" I would like to do DR. STRANGE, but you know the version of Dr. Strange I'd like to do? Did you read **Peter Gillis'** first Dr. Strange What If? story — the one where he was a disciple of Dormmamu?

CHRIS: *Yeah, it was very good.*

JOHN: A terrific story! And that character has a lot more interesting possibilities. Why? Because he's been evil, and now he is good — right? And so you got this dichotomy inside him. He's a being who's been tainted. What I'd like to do is play one Dr. Strange off the other Dr. Strange. I think the concept would be a lot more interesting. But then, it doesn't look like I'll be getting a chance to do that. And I don't know if I'd want to do anything for the majors now, anyway. I'm having a real good time.

CHRIS: *Well, are you going to be writing anything else for First?*

JOHN: We've started "Munden's Bar" as a back-up feature in GRIMJACK. Each story will be complete and unto itself; one part of the story will always take place in Munden's Bar, which is where Grimjack hangs his beret when he's not working. I'm real excited by this,

From the GRIMJACK tryout page: pencils by John's collaborator and pal Tim Truman. You can read about this exciting new artist in his own interview, immediately following this one.

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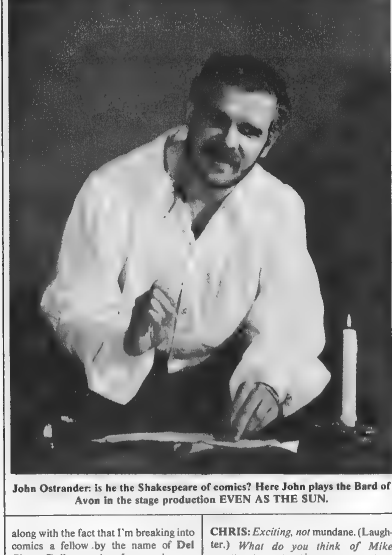
"You don't have to get hoity-toity. Who



John Ostrander: is he the Shakespeare of comics? Here John plays the Bard of Avon in the stage production EVEN AS THE SUN.

along with the fact that I'm breaking into comics a fellow by the name of **Del Close**. Del's amazing. I mean, he was director of SECOND CITY for umpteen number of years. All the people who went from SECOND CITY to SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE and SCTV have worked with Del. Del was even hired to come in and coach SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE after the new people came in, but Del found it so limiting because he couldn't do anything — the network was all over it. But Del's also a massive reader of science fiction, and he helped me plot some of the "Munden's Bar" stuff, so I'm training him to become a comic-book writer — in which case, look out! Because the guy is crazy! He's got some wonderful ideas. If we can get him fully harnessed to write comic-book stuff, he's going to be remarkable. So I think it's going to be a really exciting back-up series.

CHRIS: *Exciting, not* mundane. (Laughter.) *What do you think of Mike Gold's editorials about groups such as ACT and the people calling for a halt to video games?*

JOHN: Sometimes I agree with Mike's editorials wholeheartedly, and other times I go, "Well, I'm not so sure about that." On the video thing, I agree with Mike. People say video games are dangerous, but I grew up with a lot of things people said were dangerous for kids, and *I'm* not particularly warped. On the other hand I don't agree with him on THE SMURFS. It's true things have always been marketed to kids, but not to as large a degree as THE SMURFS. I took my niece to the movies for Christmas, to see the first big SMURF animated feature, and I went thinking, "Oh, God — an hour and a half of Saturday morning cartoons!" But the animation was actually rather wonderful, and the whole thing wasn't as bad as I was expecting. I found out THE SMURFS started in Europe and were a big hit there. They didn't actually set off the whole commercial thing they've become in America. Here they were brought in with the idea of, "Let's merchandise the shit out of them!" I think that Saturday morning cartoons are treated far more cynically, in merchandising attitudes, than many of the other programs. And that's saying quite a bit. So read more comics. *(Laughter.)*

CHRIS: *I don't think I could afford to!*

JOHN: The nice thing about working in comics is that I now have more money to spend on comics. Particularly, I've gotten into a lot of the English comics, like 2000 AD and WARRIOR. I don't think 2000 AD has been as strong as it was, say, two or three years ago, but there's some remarkable stuff going on, still, in 2000 AD. And there's some vastly entertaining, amazing stuff in WARRIOR. There's a series called "V for Vendetta" that is artistically so interesting, and so well-written, too, and it's very, very compelling. It would never stand on its own as a comic here in America.

CHRIS: *Why is that?*

JOHN: I don't think the artwork would work in color — it has to be black and white because it is all shadow and light. It's very distinctive, a very unsual way of doing a comic-book story.

CHRIS: *Well, black and white is considered unmarketable in America. We refuse to show the old Fleischer black-and-white POPEYE cartoons although they're by far the best POPEYE cartoons ever made. The same thing seems to hold true for black-and-white comics. How do you feel about that?*

JOHN: I feel kind of strongly, because actually my first desire was to have GRIMJACK be black and white since there is that *film noir* quality to it. For a while I was trying to describe GRIMJACK as "*a film noir* barbarian."

CHRIS: *Many publishers are working with the premise that black-and-white books like Marvel's DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU or TOMB OF DRACULA were not very successful.*

JOHN: Yeah, but they weren't very good, either. I'm not putting younger readers down, but it seems to me that younger readers tend to be a little more conservative in their reading approach. They like things a certain way. Change is the last thing that they're looking for. One of the biggest problems we had in STAR-SLAYER when **Lenin Delsol** and I took it over is that Lenin's artwork was such a

gives a damn if comics are an 'art-form'?"

different style from **Grell's**. They're buying it for the artwork rather than for the character or the story.

CHRIS: *A comic can have a message but, by and large, comics is an entertainment industry. And people are entertained by different things for different reasons. So they're always justified when they turn it off. You can turn off HILL STREET BLUES because you have a headache.*

JOHN: It reminds me of a quote. It's in a different field — but at the same time I found it very illuminating. I was reading an article by **Stanislavsky**, the Russian teacher and director and actor who founded what became known as the "Method School" of acting. This article was a transcript of an address that he read to a bunch of students. He said, "The theater's first job is to entertain. If we don't entertain, then we haven't achieved the purpose of theater." He pointed out that a tragedy can be entertaining, in a different way than a comedy can be entertaining. But they must be first and foremost entertaining. It's very interesting that in the theater the very self-indulgent can evoke **Stanislavsky** and say, "Well, it has to feel right." But the show has to be entertaining, to boot

CHRIS: *So far, you seem to be doing a pretty good job of entertaining*

JOHN: Well, I hope the fact that I'm having a good time will spill over into my work!

Errol Flynn couldn't have said it better, Torin. Rousing rhetoric closes the Starslayer-Grimjack team-up — and the spaceship *Jolly Roger* gets a new crew — in STARSLAYER #18. Words by Ostrander, art by Truman.

HO, YOU DOGS! DO YOU SICKEN OF YOUR STARVELING LIVES? DOES YOUR SOUL ACHE FOR THE HEAVENS? THEN COME WITH ME!
WE'LL STRIDE THE STARS AND CALL NO GOD OF MORTAL MASTER! WE'LL SAIL TO THE VERY GATES OF HELL AND SPIT IN THE DEVIL'S EYE!
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"I don't care if people object to GRIMJACK. I'm just going to keep on doing it."

TIMOTHY TRUMAN

With scarcely a pause to catch his breath, tireless Chris Henderson left John Ostrander to quiz the other co-creator of GRIMJACK, Tim Truman. Tim happened to be working on a top-secret graphic novel for First. As we go to press, Tim's still not at liberty to discuss the details of this book — nor did he have any details to discuss regarding the proposed First/DC crossover — but the young and earnest artist did speak openly about his other projects and concerns — especially his concerns: Are the violent and horrific aspects of GRIMJACK too strong for a general audience? Is "dredging all this deep dark stuff" out of his fertile mind too much for his nervous system? Is censorship the answer?

To use the title of GRIMJACK's letters page, "Spill Yer Guts," Tim . . .

CHRIS HENDERSON: *You had the beginnings of a career in magazine illustration, which is a much more "respectable" career than a comic-book artist. Why did you chuck it all and go into comics?*

TIM TRUMAN: I was a magazine illustrator, when I went to a convention in Chicago. I showed my stuff to **Joe Staton**. When I first walked up to him he must have thought, "Oh, boy, here comes another one," but when he saw my work he said, "I want you to come up to the office," so I took off a day from work and went up to the First office, and they said they really wanted to use me. I had the choice of doing either GRIMJACK or the Valeria back-up strip in WARP. I chose GRIMJACK hands down.

CHRIS: *That tells us the how, but it really doesn't tell us the why. Some illustrators would slap people in the face if they suggested they do comics.*

TIM: Well, I got into the illustrating as sort of a fluke, actually. I went to the Kubert School and I had to do something to earn an extra buck or two myself. CREATIVE COMPUTER was about twenty miles away from where the school is, so I just packed up the portfolio and went down there to see if I could pick up some work. I ended up getting a pretty steady stream of work from them, and that got me into illustration. Then after I graduated I started noticing the computer and role-playing games and I thought, "Gee, I could do that just as well," and I ended up going to TSR and showing them some stuff, and I walked out of there with some work. They really started supplying me with all the work I could handle. So there was really no need to seek out work in the comic-book field which at that time was pretty tough to break into. It was kind of a closed-door situation at Marvel, and the alternatives hadn't really started up

"While attending Joe Kubert's school I had heard

yet, and I wasn't interested in doing costumed super-heroes, much, anyway.

CHRIS: *Okay, but this keeps telling us the "how." Now you are doing two fantasy strips and once again I want to know, "Why?" Why comics?.*

TIM: Well, I was always interested in comics.

CHRIS: *See, that was simple.* (Laughter.)

TIM: Comics is what really got me drawing in the first place: ZORRO, CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED, then CONAN and later on THOR and CAPTAIN AMERICA. I had always wanted to do comics but I got sidetracked into fine arts and then into illustration. At the Kubert School I had heard all the horror stories about comics. I was still intensely interested in comics but I found the illustration field more lucrative, but then the situation in comics shifted to one that appealled to me.

CHRIS: *What is there about the super-heroes that leaves you cold?*

TIM: Well, after the Marvel explosion of the Sixties, they seem to have worn out like an old shoe. I enjoyed them when I was a kid, and I'm not saying I "grew out of them," but they just don't hold the fascination for me that the non-super-hero adventure stuff does.

CHRIS: *Can you pinpoint it? What exactly drives you away from SPIDER-MAN and on to GRIMJACK?*

TIM: It all seemed a bit juvenile after a while. There's something about costumed superheroes that seems a little fascistic. They run around and beat people up 'cause "I'm right and you're wrong."

CHRIS: *GRIMJACK is what you started out on, and then you picked up STAR-SLAYER . . .*

TIM: Right.

CHRIS: *. . . but I think your main interest seems to be GRIMJACK.*

TIM: It is.

CHRIS: *Now, what's the difference in the two strips from your point of view, that one interests you more than the other?*

TIM: Well, STARSLAYER is space opera. **Grell** is obviously a real **Edgar Rice Burroughs** freak and that carried over into STARSLAYER — sort of an attitude, like the old scientific romances of **Otis Adelbert Kline** and **Edgar Rice Burroughs**. GRIMJACK on the other hand is a lot seedier and darker, and influenced by detective stories and movies and things of that nature. GRIMJACK is sort of a hard-boiled detective in a science-fiction setting.

CHRIS: *You're more of a detective fan, then?*

TIM: More of a seediness fan. *(Laughter.)* I liked the **Burroughs** stuff immensely, especially when I was a kid. But the stuff I enjoy now has a darker side to it — it's more street-wise, and GRIMJACK certainly fills that bill.

Tim illustrated "Omega War" for ARES, one of the first comics specifically created as support material for a role-playing game.

I'd never ridden a nomad warboar before, much less fought on one. Back in the Good Days, before the bombs dropped, these great, stinking razorbacks had been genetically engineered as extra meat-on-the-hoof for rich technocrats. During the Days of Confusion they had taken over the empty, devastated plains.
© 1982 TSR, Inc.

all the horror stories about doing comics."

CHRIS: *Well, how much of GRIMJACK is yours and how much John's?*

TIM: It's about fifty-fifty. John came up with the original idea. Our working relationship is very tight. John is my best friend. We have notions about where we want to carry adventure comics, and we really have strong opinions about characterization and realism in comics. We like to tell a gut-level story with a lot of character and a lot of good meat to the story, and with a lot of little subtle undertones and sub-plots. And we like taking this character who seemingly has this whole history behind him and letting him tell his own story. But John will supply the plots and I'll try to give the plots ninety percent more than what they have, and then he'll take it from there — he'll take my pencils, and through the dialogue, give the pencils ninety percent more than what's there. And so we really add an equal amount to the story. It's kind of a standing joke at First — the amount of copy I'll put on the page along with my drawing. I'm constantly writing on the margins and down through the gutters my impressions of exactly what the characters should be saying or what I feel, as I draw it, the characters should be doing. Sometimes I'll attach little notes to the background, outlining my concept of certain characters, like Bob the Watch-Lizard. He popped into the story, and he was sitting on a table there, and I decided, "Gee, I kind of like this character." His whole history sort of sprang into my mind. And we'll work a lot like that.

In what we call the All-Fight Issue of STARSLAYER — issue #13 — where we had the Harlequin Squad chasing Grimjack through warehouses — I really invented those guys, the Harlequin Squad. But we ended embellishing that group and giving them a whole history unto themselves, so that we could re-use them, because they came out as pretty interesting characters. And John'll give me bits and pieces of what he wants in the character and I'll give him a few more bits and pieces, and then he'll give a few more bits and pieces, and by the end of the page we'll have quite a bit of character background, and what we hope are some really interesting characters.

CHRIS: *Each story, GRIMJACK seems to get a little stronger. It's tame compared to a lot of forms of literature you can find, but for comics there's a couple of really strong things in there, like the chapter of "Buried Past" in STARSLAYER #14, where he kills the vampire. Are you trying to break the audience in step by step — taking Grimjack into a seedier, dirtier world?*

TIM: Grimjack is taking *us* into seedier, dirtier worlds. *(Laughter.)* The more John and I find out about the character, the

Tim wrote "Omega War" with David J. Ritchie. This panel appears in ARES #14.

The nomads had finally tamed and trained them, turning them into the brutal fighting machines of incredible endurance. On them, the nomads ruled the Badlands. Me, I'd have settled for a hovertank in this showdown!

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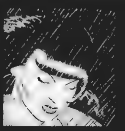

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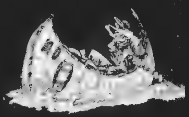

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TIMOTHY TRUMAN

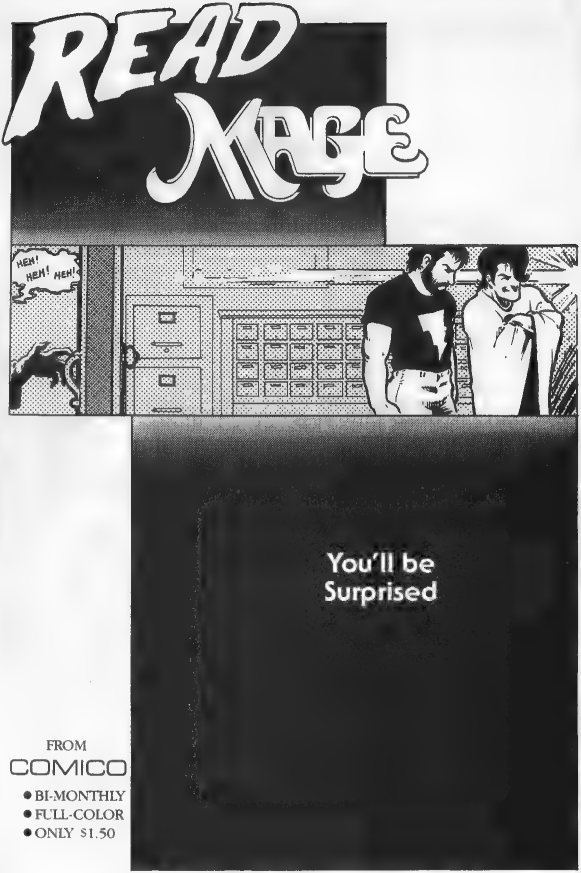
"Superheroes seem a little fascistic."

Grimjack *a la* Josey Wales. Left: unused cover art for GRIMJACK #10. Right: the cover art you'll see on the stands.

more we add on to the character, the more that sort of thing happens. Grimjack's starting to tell his own story now — we have the character that firmly established. That "Buried Past" chapter was a weird episode, through, for both John and me. All he had in the plot was "Grimjack disposes of vampire." As I was sitting down to layout and pencil that stuff, I thought, "Gee, how do you get rid of a vampire?" Which brought a lot of questions to mind. You have Grimjack in this suburban setting — a lily-white honky neighborhood where all the neighbors know each other's business — and he just killed a vampire in the house. He certainly can't go dragging the body of the vampire out of the house as he leaves. He has to dispose of the body somewhere! Well, my mind really turned over about it. And then there was sort of a symbolism in what I did, too. I thought, "We'll have to get rid of her in the bathtub." *(Laughter.)* So things started happening. The shower scene of PSYCHO came to mind, as well as all the heavy symbolism **Hitchcock** put into his getting-rid-of-the-victim scenes. Those two pages where Grimjack finally disposes of the vampire are probably the two hardest pages I've ever tried to draw, because I was dredging up all this deep dark stuff out of my mind and putting it on paper, and actually getting a little nervous about it. So I showed it to **Mike Gold** and said, "Look, is this a little too strong?" Because I was still feeling a little nervous about it. I liked it as a piece of art, but as a published work I was still a little leery about it. Joe and Mike turned it over to **Ostrander**, and one night John called me up and said, "Gee, I see what you mean about this scene." He was having a whole lot of trouble writing it. It had such stark imagery there — a very dirty little scene. After I'd inked the piece up, it was still disturbing. But, as you say, it's really a tame scene compared to some things that are portrayed in film and novels. And the fact that we were getting nervous about writing it and that it was affecting us was because we were worried about the reaction of the distributors and retailers. In the end we justified it by thinking, "Golly, if we were making a movie — or if we were writing a book — we'd have no qualms whatsoever about this scene." And what we want to do is equate our art form — and that's what we consider GRIMJACK — with other forms of art. If a movie containing such scenes can stand on its own, then a comic book containing such scenes should be able to stand on its own.

CHRIS: *Of course, movies have a rating system, comics don't. And little kids can walk in and buy a comic. What do you think of the new push for a comics rating system?*

TIM: It's something that I've really been thinking about, especially in the last couple of months, since that vampire episode in GRIMJACK. Golly, I have so many questions about it myself! In some ways I can justify a rating system and in other ways I can't. I'm against censorship on any level. People should judge an art form on its own merits. Now as far as a ratings system goes, it really isn't an issue that I



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"GRIMJACK is taking John Ostrander and me into dirtier worlds."

have decided myself. In some ways I would think it would be detrimental and limit the audience.

CHRIS: *Well, how would you feel if tomorrow that became First policy?*

TIM: It would be just something else that I'd have to work with. What if we came up with an episode of GRIMJACK that anyone would let their kids read– not that we are doing stuff that kids shouldn't read, but I'm certain there are people out there who would have second thoughts about letting their little kids get a hold of it. We would be labelled as "Adult Material" — "Adult" having the connotations of "sex and violence," of which there is some in GRIMJACK, particularly violence — but it would be such a subjective label! You'd have an episode that nobody would have any objection to labelled "adult" and put alongside stuff that might have a much stronger violence content.

CHRIS: *Is there really such a thing as a comic book* nobody *would object to?*

TIM: Well, I guess not.

CHRIS: *There hasn't been an issue of GRIMJACK yet that you couldn't find a sizeable group of people who'd object to it.*

TIM: But I really don't care if they object to it or not. I'm just going to keep on doing what I'm doing with it.

CHRIS: *I notice in GRIMJACK a return to what I guess is best called the "funnies style" of art. In other words, we see very little of a Neal Adams or John Byrne realism and more of the Chester Gould funny-page style. GRIMJACK is violent and moody and scary and yet there's still that sense of whimsy in the drawing.*

TIM: Sure. Some of the whimsy is there to downplay some of the violence. What in particular are you thinking of, Chris?

CHRIS: *Well, there's the whole mood. Like, in "Buried Past" you have the vampire turning on her father with a large New Year's Eve whoopee tongue coming out of her mouth! It's almost funny.*

TIM: Well, you remember the scene in PHANTASM, that great old Saturday matinee movie from a few years ago? With the little silver balls that whiz down the corridors and land on people's heads, and this little screw would come out and screw into the people's heads and blood would gush out the back of the ball? Well, the original print of that had blood only squirting out for five or ten seconds, and it was real strong. You were really horrified.

Splash for the unsettling final chapter of "Buried Past" in STARSLAYER #14.

In the final cut they extended the squirting blood out for what seems like at least half an hour. It became sort of comedic — there's just not as much blood in the human body as this thing was squirting out! So, in the end, even though you have all this blood and gore, it becomes unrealistic. Now, in the page you're talking about, we wanted to give subtle undertone of incest to the scene —

CHRIS: *Which you did!*

TIM: Yeah — maybe I shouldn't say "subtle"! *(Laughter.)* The tongue of course is a heavily sexual symbol, and if I were to imagine the tongue, say, six inches out of the mouth, it would look sexier than the way I had it — hanging out five feet. The tongue still got the message across but it was whimsical.

CHRIS: *But I'm talking more of the*

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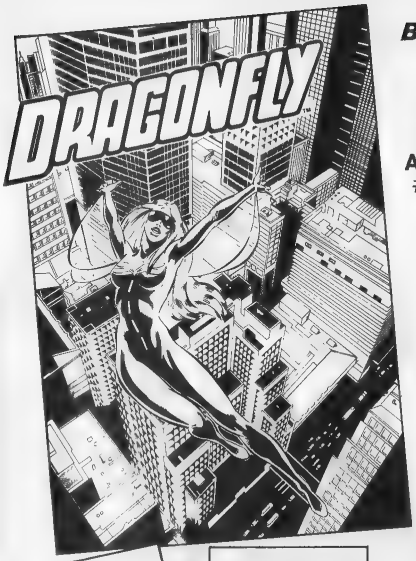

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AC COMICS

Dear Rik and Bill,
I really enjoyed AC No. 4 starring **DRAGONFLY**. The cover art was beautiful. Kudos to Mr. Dooley. It's always nice to see a new female character, one that is very strong physically and has the potential for many story possibilities. Are super strength and mach plus flying speeds her only powers? I'm looking forward to each and every future issue of **DRAGONFLY** (and **THE SHADE**, too!)

Jay Elliott, Jr.
Las Vegas, Nv

This one has possibilities. The situation of a novice female superhero with an envious male associate has good potential for some dramatic tension and for some lighthearted fun. And speaking of fun, Rik Levins did seem to have a good time with the story, interjecting some of the more mundane, but nevertheless interesting and amusing, problems that a super-hero might run into. My main objection is that the origin and nature of Dragonfly's powers (and how she came by them) was left out. Just trying to build up interest for further adventures? You succeeded. So let's have another story soon.

T.M. Maple
Toronto, Canada

DRAGONFLY's origin story was very good, especially the dialogue. Nancy Arrazolo doesn't fit the mold of run-of-the-mill superheroes, female or otherwise. I would definitely like to see more.

Kevin J. Dooley
Van Nuys, CA

Your new **DRAGONFLY** is superb. The comic world needs more heroines like her. Most heroines are weak or have some sort of mental power. Not **DRAGONFLY**, though. She is powerful and sexy.

Patrick Farley
Pomeroy
Highlands, FL

To put it as simply as possible: MORE **DRAGONFLY**, PLEASE!

David Van Meer
LaConner, WA

DRAGONFLY™

"GRIMJACK is a lot seedier than STARSLAYER."

whole broad base of GRIMJACK. Even the Harlequin Squad is not as deadly serious as it would be under the hands, say, of Frank Miller. There's a lightness to the style — a very old Sunday-funny-pages newspaper look to the work.

TIM: Even though you won't find any five-foot-tongues in those old funny pages. *(Laughter.)*

CHRIS: *Well, we've grown up a little bit since LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE.*

TIM: Actually that lightness comes from more than the Sunday funnies, although when I was young I had to rely more on the Sunday funnies than comic books. That lightness and whimsy is coming out of the old adventure films that I used to watch on television. Every day after school and on Saturday I used to watch these films like GUNGA DIN — which is a great adventure film but heavily comedic at the same time — and ROCKET MAN. There's really a lot of fun to those movies. That's what I draw on.

CHRIS: *There's also a lightness to the little asides that pop up in GRIMJACK — much more than they do in STARSLAYER — things like packages addressed to Dashiell Hammett.* (Laughter.)

TIM: Hammett's another big influence on us.

CHRIS: *Who was responsible for drawing the two plot-lines together for the STARSLAYER-GRIMJACK team-up?*

TIM: Well, it was John's idea to bring Torin to Cynosure, Grimjack's turf. And probably the editorial office had a little to do with it. It's a way of saying that Cynosure is very important in the First Universe, for potential future crossovers.

CHRIS: *Is there a "First Universe" as there is a Marvel Universe?*

TIM: Cynosure is the First Universe. There's no talk of an AMERICAN FLAGG-JON SABLE crossover, but such a thing *could* happen, through Cynosure, because both books are realities unto themselves and Cynosure is sort of a gathering-place of all the dimensions — all different alternative realities.

CHRIS: *So ten years down the road when Mike Gold and Rick Obadiah are jaded, we'll be seeing the first E-MAN/GRIMJACK team-up.* (Laughter.)

TIM: Well, I've seen Grimjack get a cameo in E-MAN. The First Policy is that they'll go for a crossover when it's feasible, and when there's a good reason. The Grimjack and Starslayer crossover has some very good reasons. First, they're both science fiction in nature and lend themselves to a crossover better than any other books. But secondly, and most important, it's actually the crux, the turning point, in the STARSLAYER saga — the story on which every other issue of STARSLAYER will be based. Torin is now developing into his own character. He's always sort of been overrun by Tamara and Sam and Crayne and just about everyone else in that book, and really was never a strong character in his own right,

Torin McQuillon (with Sam the robot on his shoulder) and the two tempestuous women in his life: Tamara and Chris.

From the cover of STARSLAYER #25.

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"The whole Marvel bit had me worried."

and that was *the* Starslayer challenge. I took the Starslayer challenge when I first started working on the book, and we really feel that the Grimjack team-up issue and the chapters that followed are really the climax of our STARSLAYER mission, which was to make Torin a viable character.

CHRIS: *His own character being what? How do you see Torin? What was he, and what will be be when you get to the point where you're happy with him?*

TIM: First of all, I always enjoyed STARSLAYER even though some of it was sort of redundant and **Mike Grell's** influences were definitely showing. But he looked like he was having a lot of fun with it. And Mike is just such an incredible writer! Mike was able to develop an interesting character with a lot of potential. The relationship between Tamara and Torin was extremely interesting. You had this woman who was totally using Torin for her own ends, and sometimes you'd feel real sympathetic toward her, but at other times, like when Torin goes tumbling off this escarpment, you don't really feel that she feels very sorry for him. One of the most interesting things that Mike had started with, back when he started the series, was that you had a Celt brought to the far-flung future. But immediately he got a cybernetic headband slapped on his head and was linked with a robot, and he could have been just any person born in that age. His whole primitive Celtic background was ripped away. So when John and I started the book we wanted to return to that interesting concept. We said, "Well, let's make Torin more of a primitive." His reaction to the future hadn't been really played on much, so that was our starting point. We then saw some interesting differences between Tam and Torin — there are a lot of interesting differences between Tam and Torin, of course *(laughter)* — but psychologically we kept seeing things we could play on. Tamara being a child of the future would be logical and reasoning, and Torin being a primitive person would be a lot more instinctual, and so we wanted to bring out that aspect some more and have more interplay between Tamara and Torin based on the psychological aspects.

CHRIS: *Is Torin going to come to terms with the society he's in — and if so, how?*

TIM: Well, I don't want to give away too much, just that Torin will come to grips with the fact that he's in the future and that he's stuck with it. He's been running, and then at the end of issue #14 he's said, "Well, I'm not going to run any more." He's not going to run from the people who are chasing him but more importantly he's not going to run from his life anymore. There's no way he can go back into the past without affecting the future and so he'll stay there and make the best of it. And accept his lot.

CHRIS: *Anything you want to rant about? Is there anyone you feel is ruining the industry?* (Laughter.)

TIM: Well, the whole Marvel bit had me a little worried, their glutting the market with reprints and trying to dry up the market. One of the things I'm worried about is creators' rights, and the fact that there isn't much diversity in comics. It's only because of the alternative comics that creators are starting to get a fairer shake. The more independent publishers Marvel drives out of business, the less creators' rights we're going to have. The fewer publishers creators can go to, the less creators' rights we're going to be able to demand — well, not really "demand," but "negotiate for," just like any other business. I don't want to see a monopoly ever again where you only have two companies putting out comic-books, and you have to take what they offer or leave it. It really doesn't leave much leeway for the creator.

Bucky Paddleslapper, a character for a proposed First graphic novel, TIME BEAVERS.

Art by Tim Truman.

© 1983 Timothy Truman

"I couldn't swallow the presentation of martial

VAL MAYERIK

The term "Renaissance man" certainly could be used to describe Val Mayerik. Besides pencilling and inking for Marvel, Eclipse and HEAVY METAL, Val's also an actor, a director, a writer, and an artist of an entirely different sort — a martial artist. During a recent trip to New York City from his native Ohio, Val visited Marvel Comics' Manhattan offices and there spoke to Jim Salicrup about his intense, on-going love affair with karate, how comics (including his own) have treated the martial arts, and what constitutes a good fight scene. Val also covered his comic-book work, from HOWARD THE DUCK to his latest collaboration with Steve Gerber, the graphic novel (now also an Epic Comics series) VOID INDIGO, an unusual saga of science fiction, satire and reincarnation.

JIM SALICRUP: *How did you get involved in HOWARD THE DUCK?*

VAL MAYERIK: Well, I was the first one to draw Howard. And I'm not blowing my horn about that. Everybody keeps reminding me of it. Everytime they see me at a convention, people say, "You were the first guy to draw HOWARD THE DUCK!" *(Laughter.)* I drew Howard in MAN-THING, and then Howard suddenly became very popular, with his own book and another artist, as if I'd never existed and never drawn him. I never understood why, and at the time I didn't care that much because it was a low period in my career and I was concentrating on other parts of my life, so I said to myself, "Okay, they didn't give me the duck book — big deal!" As time went by I began feeling a little left out, wishing I had a chance to do more with Howard, and I did have a chance to do more Howard stories later on. I like the character, and there's a chance Steve and I will be doing a Howard book again in the future.

JIM: *Oh, I'd like to see that again. I remember when I was the coordinator of the HOWARD THE DUCK newspaper strip and you were drawing it.*

VAL: I only worked on it about six weeks.

JIM: *Seems a lot longer.* (Laughter.)

VAL: It was absolute hell, because when **Gene Colan** left the strip, he was terribly behind, and I had to do — literally — a week's worth of strips in one night. And the next day I had to do a week's worth of

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Val Mayerik ("May-er-ik")
Occupation: Artist
Born: 29 March 1950 — Youngstown, Ohio
Residence: Strongsville, Ohio
Training: Largely self-taught. I had some theoretical and historical studies in college, but primarily I've learned to do comics by working in comics with people who knew more than me.
Credits: HOWARD THE DUCK, VOID INDIGO, KA-ZAR, THE STARLING, "Paradox" in MARVEL PREVIEW, CONAN THE BARBARIAN.
Other Interests: Directing, acting, the martial arts

arts in comics and I sure didn't want to draw it."

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"Working on HOWARD THE DUCK was absolute hell."

dailies, and a Sunday, until I got six weeks ahead, which is where you're supposed to be in a syndicated strip. And by the time I got caught up and could enjoy doing the strip, I realized it was losing money — it was dying. The syndicate wasn't promoting it, and Marvel seemed to have lost enthusiasm for it. People tried to talk me into staying on it — but it was too much work and I was only getting about two hundred dollars a month. It just wasn't worth it. So I quit the strip. I think **Alan Kupperberg** took over for a short time, and then it was gone forever.

JIM: *You also did an annual, and the two regular issues . . .*

VAL: "Star Waughs." I liked those.

JIM: *So now you're working on VOID INDIGO. How did that come about?*

VAL: A year ago I was sitting around in Cleveland, doing a few stories that I was pretty happy with, no major projects on the horizon, when **Mike Friedrich** called me. He was starting to serve the function of representative for artists and writers who wanted to get together packages of original concepts to present to the publishers. He asked me if I would be interested in reading a new script, and I said, "Yes." He sent me a script by **Steve Gerber**. I liked it. Steve and I talked about it and got together on it and we got it rolling. I did a lot of presentation sketches and Mike took it around and repped it to as many publishers who were in existence — Pacific, Eclipse, DC — and Marvel bought it.

JIM: *How long did that process take, from Mike's first call to the point where Marvel bought it?*

VAL: To me, it seemed like a long time. I guess I expected things to happen in a couple of weeks, and it really took more than that — about six months, maybe more. Because of the bad experience Steve had had with HOWARD THE DUCK he was being very . . .

JIM: *Cautious?*

VAL: Not so much cautious, but he was doing every possible contingency — to make sure that nothing would ever be taken from him again. So, consequently, there was a lot of contractual discussion, negotiations and a minor dispute before everyone was satisfied and it was really decided, "Yes, now we will get down to work on it."

The historic first appearance of Howard the Duck in GIANT-SIZE MAN-THING # 4. Art by Val Mayerik.

JIM: *Were you actually involved in the negotiations?*

VAL: Steve's attorney made the joke that I was getting free legal advice. *(Laughter.)* You see, I could have hired an attorney, but I knew there was nothing he could get for me that Steve's attorney wasn't going to get for Steve, and I knew — with Steve being so incredibly fastidious about this thing, that whatever Steve would agree to I would agree to. If Steve was going to be satisfied, I knew everybody else was going to be satisfied. This is not a slam at Steve, but he just had that compulsive attitude about getting everything right this time, because he did not want a repeat of the HOWARD THE DUCK thing. You can't blame him. And when it was done I said, "Sure, I'll sign my name to that contract." Because I knew it had to be one of the best graphic-novel contracts probably going, to date. And I still think we got us a pretty good contract.

JIM: *So is VOID INDIGO owned by you and Steve?*

VAL: Right. It's quite an accomplishment from the days of HOWARD THE DUCK.

JIM: *What is VOID INDIGO?*

VAL: The premise is that things haven't changed much in twenty thousand years. Modern man and primitive man, although they behave differently on the surface, are both motivated by the same things. Modern man has supplanted many of the ancient myths and symbols with science and technology, but the same patterns of behavior

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Bev and Howard have a spat in the HOWARD newspaper strip.
Dialogue by Steve Gerber, art by Val Mayerik.

BUT EVEN I'VE HADDA WONDER, TOOTS--WHAT YOU'RE DOIN' RUNNIN' AROUND WITH A DUCK, WHEN YOU COULD HAVE YER PICK OF--
IN ONE OF THE UNIVERSE'S MOST OBSCURE MACHINATIONS--WE WERE MADE FOR EACH OTHER.
YOU GOT THAT, TURKEY?!
;waaugh; PLEASE, TOOTS-- NO RACIAL JOKES.

© 1978 MCG

"In VOID INDIGO, Steve Gerber's not

Val Mayerik back-cover art for the Epic graphic novel VOID INDIGO. From top to bottom: Koth, the Dark Lord; Ath'Agaar, barbarian chief; and Ren, who, with Ath'Agaar, suffers a horrible death at the hands of the Dark Lords.

still exist in terms of survival, quests for love and power, and so on.

The storyline starts twenty-thousand years ago. The Evil Dark Lords control an area of what is now the Southwestern part of the United States. Their domain, however, is rapidly weakening and crumbling, and it could possibly fall to a barbarian leader-hero by the name of Ath-Agar. The Dark Lords conspire against him, and torture him and his mate. But they don't get away with this. They assume Ath-Agaar is dead at one point, and he's not, and he starts a chain of events that ends in the destruction not only in the domain of the Dark Lords, but also Ath-Agaar and his people. Complete and utter destruction. Total annihilation. There's not even any archaeological evidence left in America that these people ever existed. The souls of all these people go into the Void — the Void Indigo — the place in Eternity that the souls inhabit, until they find another physical being to manifest themselves through.We find Ath-Agaar has been reincarnated twenty thousand years into the future, in the persona of Jhagur, an alien warship captain. One of the Dark Lords has been reincarnated into an Olympic athlete on Earth. Through psychic communication with the athlete, Jhagur is kind of coerced to come to Earth, and through a circuitous series of events, he discovers why he's there, who really he is and what his mission is.

JIM: *What is his mission?*

VAL: Simply, to seek out these other reincarnated Dark Lords and square things with them — by vengeance or, if they've reincarnated themselves on a higher plane and have redeemed themselves through many lifetimes, to reconcile himself in another way

JIM: *What other way?*

VAL: That remains to be seen. The graphic novel ends pretty much with Jhagur discovering his true self and learning his mission. The Epic Comics series takes up the story from there.

JIM: *For a Steve Gerber work, it sounds very grim. Is there a lighter side to it?*

VAL: There is. Jhagur has a very grim mien and alien look — carnelian red skin and almost a Neanderthal kind of brow — but he looks human, and it's kind of funny how he responds to Earth's popular culture. He's obsessed with television and pop entertainment. He'll watch MTV videos for hours — not because he finds them at all culturally redeemable, or even entertaining, but because he's trying to find out what's behind the creation of this junk culture. And I had an idea for him that I thought was funny — he likes beer I had this picture of this alien sitting down in this living room, drinking a can of beer. Alcohol doesn't intoxicate him —he just likes the taste of beer. It's satisfying to his palate. He has a sidekick, a girl, Linette, and they have a platonic relationship. She's very loyal to him and very unquestioning about his alienness and why he's here. She's kind of funny. She's a little like Howard the Duck's Bev — not as bright, but just as independent and gritty and tough and self-contained. She's more of a victim than Bev. She turned a few tricks in a desperate time of her life, but basically she's a good kid. Real sexy. The kind of character **Valerie Perrine** might play. So there is some humor in the story. But for the most part it's a strong indictment against the lack of restraint on the part of the powers-that-be, and the complete absorption of junk-culture into the psychology of modern-day man. Steve's not going to let anyone get away with anything — which is, of course,

© 1984 Steve Gerber & Val Mayerik

going to let anyone get away with anything."

typical Steve. That's what I like about the story. Steve can pull out all the stops and really get crazy without being too overindulgent. I like the way that he can really flesh out a character, and add some grit and texture to the dialogue and to the everyday lives of the characters.

JIM: *Especially considering how bizarre the circumstances are.*

VAL: Right.

JIM: *That's the whole trick — making it believable. When you were creating designs for the characters, did Steve have definite ideas about them, or were you allowed a lot of leeway?*

VAL: Steve had some pretty definite ideas with some of the characters and more general and nebulous ideas with others. With Jhagur, he definitely wanted the carnelian red skin, and he wanted him to have these pupil-less, indigo eyeballs. I didn't find that any problem, because it was easy to integrate into my concept of the character. With Ath-Agaar, the Dark Lords, Linette and the more peripheral characters, I pretty much went ahead and did what I wanted to do. I designed all their costumes.

JIM: *How long did it take you to draw this book?*

VAL: Two months, because it was fully illustrated. I painted the entire thing. Every panel, at least the first twenty pages, got a very heavy-handed application of paint to make it look like a big movie-poster illustration.

JIM: *Did you do pencilling first?*

VAL: Even if you're doing a painting, you've got to have a pencilled structure underneath, and I had to have basic pencilling done in the beginning in order that **Archie Goodwin** could see what ws going on, and to let Steve know where to position the balloons so that **Adam Kubert**, who was lettering it, knew exactly where he was going to place balloons and captions. Everybody had to have Xeroxes of the basic drawings. But there really wasn't an inking stage. It went from the pencils to the full illustration, so the inking and the coloring all took place at one time.

JIM: *Who are your artistic influences?*

VAL: Early on in my career it was **Frazetta**. I think the guy who illustrated the GNOMES books is an excellent illustrator and painter. He can handle all kinds of media — pencilling, water-coloring, oils. He's a tremendous influence, not so much in subject matter but just in style. I also like **Jeff Jones** a lot. I really don't try to emulate these people, but they're people I tend to respond to.

JIM: *Do you prefer to work as a painter, or using pencils and inks?*

You can't keep a good man down: Ath'Agaar returns, eons later, as Jhagur, alien warrior, to wreak bloody vengance on the reincarnated Dark Lords. Val Mayerik art for issue #1 of the new monthly Epic series, VOID INDIGO.

VOID INDIGO VOID INDIGO VOID INDIGO VOID INDIGO VOID INDIGO
THE CHANT OF THE VOID IS BANES FOR YOU, DARK LORDS!
AND FOR REN-- WHOSE LOVE YOU STOLE FROM ME BY MURDER V AGES PAST
IT SUMMONS YOU!

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VAL: I'm oriented toward doing illustrative detail. I'm the kind of person who looks at an old person's face and finds that so interesting that I could spend a week just rendering that face. Basically, I have the same orientation that a portrait artist or a painter like **Andrew Wyeth** would have — to bring something profound out of that subject. But if I allow myself to get too hung up on that illustrating comics, I'm defeating the purpose of doing a comic book, which is to go as quickly as you can from one panel to another and keep the story exciting. There's only so much detail comics can allow, before it becomes a negative element, an element that makes things thick and heavy. And a lot of that has to do with panel design and page design. I like pretty much to draw the kind of comic that I like to read. And I pretty much always have liked to look at one panel — like an **Al Williamson** panel or a **Richard Corben** panel — to look into that and see a little world in there, a little story taking place in each panel. Seeing the whole page as one graphic design is important, to a degree, but I think for me, it gets in the way of telling the story. I try to have the most direct and simplest storytelling techniques that I can.

JIM: *There seems to be many different schools of comic-book storytelling. Take CONAN for an example. I really liked when Barry Windsor-Smith was doing it. I can still remember his cities.*

VAL: Yeah!

JIM: *And to me, that made it incredibly believable. While another very good artist, John Buscema, has an entirely different approach with regard to the story environment. It's almost as if Conan's been going through the same town for ten years.*

VAL: Everybody's an Arab.

JIM: *When I first saw some of your paintings, I really felt that I was seeing your art fully realized for the first time. When I looked at your art before there was always some problem — I thought maybe it wasn't the right inker, or the reproduction wasn't what it could be — but when I saw the paintings, that's when I was really impressed. How long have you been painting?*

VAL: Well, when I was a kid and learning to draw, I didn't draw with pen and ink, I drew with pencil. With a pencil you can get a variety of tones and a variety of lights and darks, and you can get a soft rendering with a pencil that you can't get with a pen. I've always felt very confident and comfortable with being able to render a form beautifully, giving it a lot of texture and dimension, and sense of depth. Aside from VOID INDIGO, where I could paint, I couldn't really spend as much time on a panel as I could on a painting. I'm trying now to get a hard, graphic style married to some fine-line rendering. I think that **Walt Simonson** has accomplished that. I wouldn't try to emulate **Simonson**, but that's just an example of the kind of direction that I think would make my comics work stronger. In comics there's a point of diminishing returns, where you keep trying to render and render with pen-and-ink lines, you cross-hatch and cross-hatch, until pretty soon you burn out, and everything's muddied up. I want to stick with my strong points, what excites me, but I still want to integrate more of the graphic design elements into my finished work.

JIM: *When did you first seriously consider making a living in comics?*

VAL: Oh, not until the day I had to. I read comics as a child — SGT. ROCK, SUPERMAN and BATMAN — but not in my early teens. In college I started picking up SILVER SURFER and THOR and some of the Warren comics when they introduced the Spanish artists. **Esteban Maroto** I especially liked. It never really occurred to me that I might end up in comics. I liked them, and I thought they might have an influence on me becoming an illustrator, and I might some day work in advertising, or as a portrait painter. I really had no idea what I wanted to do because I had no skills and no commercial portfolio. I wasn't able to acquire these skills at the colleges that I went to. I thought I was going to end up teaching karate part time and driving a delivery truck for a living. I found out that **Dan Adkins** lived in Ohio, about forty or fifty miles south of where I was living, and I desperately threw all my stuff into a portfolio, went

Jhagur meets a supernatural foe in VOID INDIGO #1.

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FANTAGRAPHICS BOOKS™

"My career has been inconsistent at best."

I THOUGHT YOU UNDERSTOOD. I THOUGHT YOU BELIEVED THE STORY OF HIS REINCARNATION AND MINE.
WHY ELSE WOULD YOU HAVE SEWN MY WARRIOR'S GARB-- OR HELPED ME FIND THIS SWORD?
I DUNNO--I THOUGHT IT WAS-- I MEAN, LIKE A GAME, LIKE KIDS PLAYIN' PRETEND--!
I DIDN'T THINK YOU WERE REALLY GONNA GO OUT AN' KILL PEOPLE...!

© 1984 Steve Gerber & Val Mayerik

Linette realizes her roommate is even stranger than she had thought. Gerber words, Mayerik art.

to Dan and asked him if he could help me out. I ended up working for Dan for the summer, in kind of an apprenticeship, assistant capacity along with **Craig Russell**. Eventually Dan was able to procure some work for me, from Marvel. That was pretty much where it started. Had I not met Dan, I have no idea what I'd be doing now. There's a good possibility I'd have never gotten into comics.

JIM: *When you were a fan, was it the stories or the artwork in comics that you were interested in?*

VAL: The artwork was my major interest, but I also liked some of the stories. I thought the SILVER SURFER stories were very entertaining. I loved THOR because I was into Norse mythology. I liked the illustrative quality of the art that was appearing in the Warren publications of the time, which was a lot closer to what I was oriented to as an illustrator. I liked the idea of a black-and-white magazine because the line reproduction seemed to be better in terms of being faithful to the fine details. I really enjoyed looking at that stuff.

JIM: *What did you learn working with Dan Adkins? Were there any surprises, any technical things you didn't know about?*

VAL: Well, I found that storytelling was really the bottom line. I could draw the figures well and I thought I had it all licked, then I realized my storytelling ability was a bit bland. Sometimes I took shortcuts through some real major action scenes just so I could get to a close-up of a face, because as I say, I like to render detail and human faces and so forth. So I was not fully utilizing a lot of dramatic tools I could have used to tell the story.

JIM: *Joe Rubinstein has a lot of the same instincts. He usually goes right to the head shots and inks them first. He'll labor over those, and maybe do the figures, and then everything else he considers a real chore. Backgrounds are not where his heart is. He showed me some of your paintings and they're portraits, and that's what he'd really like to do.*

What were the first things you did with Dan?

VAL: I helped him with SUB-MARINER. He, Craig and I inked a **Barry Smith** CONAN. **Sal Buscema** inked some of it, too.

Val Mayerik illustrates a Chris Claremont script for SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #74.

© 1981 Conan Properties, Inc.

It's the only book I've seen that had four inkers on one book. *(Laughter.)*

JIM: *There are others. We don't like to talk about them.*

VAL: Then I did a BRAK THE BARBARIAN story which **Joe Sinnott** inked, an adaptation of THE INVISIBLE MAN which Dan inked, then I went on to THONGOR, **Lin Carter**'s barbarian, and I inked seven or eight issues of them.

JIM: *Did you have any preferences in the kind of story you wanted to do?*

VAL: I wanted to draw sword-and-sorcery because it had a texture and organic gritiness, and that's what I was looking for. I also wanted to draw action and human physiques and muscles.

JIM: *And if they gave you SPIDER-MAN you wouldn't have been as happy?*

VAL: No, but then, **Roy Thomas** or whoever it was sending me scripts at the time was astute enough to realize that I really wasn't that good at superhero stuff because I wasn't that interested in it. Consequently, they were wise enough not to try to get me into that mold.

JIM: *What were some of the series you did that you were happy with?*

VAL: My career has been inconsistent at best. I've sometimes had other priorities in life. For example, when I was really deeply into the martial arts, some of my comic-book work suffered. I weathered that storm and maintained enough credibility to keep on working until I could redeem myself with some good work. I've been fortunate in that, and I probably owe a lot of that just to the nature of the comics industry, because there's a lot of decent people in comics who will keep giving you a chance. It takes a long time before you screw up enough that no one's going to give you work any more. I don't know if that could be said for other fields of commercial art. Also, I had poor inkers and poor colorists. But there were some high points in my career. I thought the KA-ZARs that **Doug Moench** and I worked

Once a monstrous evil threatened the Earth. Now it's back.
And all that stands between it and final success are the...

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by BILL MANTLO and JACKSON GUICE

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"I wanted to draw action and muscles."

on were really nice pieces. Maybe not that dynamic — they didn't have figures jumping out of the page at you — but nicely drawn with interesting stories.

JIM: *They had flying sharks . . .*

VAL: Right! I also enjoyed working on "Paradox" with **Bill Mantlo** for MARVEL PREVIEW. It was a fun character and I'm still plesed with the way that story looks. That was my first attempt at a more graphic style. **Larry Hama** and I worked on a series about a young *samurai* — "The Young Master" series — for EERIE magazine, and I was able to experiment with some other kinds of illustrative techniques. In fact, that's where I started getting into painting comics. Even though it was in black and white, I was utilizing ink and tempera and acrylics and colored pencils. Not very many people saw them, but they were really good, action-packed, gutsy stories.

JIM: *A lot of good stuff is buried in those old Warrens.*

VAL: That's right.

JIM: *They produced a run of stuff that you didn't want to look at, and then when you least expected it, they had some really nice material. Toward the end they were reprinting a lot of nice stuff. They had a Wally Wood issue, and a lot of that was actually drawn by Dan Adkins.*

VAL: Yeah, or he was inking the backgrounds. One of the two. He definitely worked with Wally at one time.

JIM: *At what point did you come from Ohio to New York?*

VAL: I moved to New York in 1977, and I was here until 1980, living right here in Manhattan, and the last year I was living in New York I was sharing a studio with **Howard Chaykin**, **Jim Starlin** and **Walt Simonson.**

JIM: *How was that?*

VAL: That was interesting. I liked it. It was on West 29th Street between 7th and 8th Avenues. We had a lot of space. We had a couple of parties there. It was just good to have other people around and see what they were doing and see if you could pick anything up from them. And it was good just to have someone around to talk to, to keep you motivated. I have worked alone in my home, off and on, for a great number of years, for long periods of time, and it takes an awful lot to keep motivated when you're constantly working in a solitary situation. So sharing the studio was good for keeping psyched up.

JIM: *Did it get competitive? Or was it supportive?*

VAL: Well, it was neither. *(Laughter.)* I can't say anybody was out to be terribly supportive. Periodically somebody might say, "Yeah. I like that." But we weren't competitive, either. We were all doing different kinds of things. We all had different avenues that we were exploring. We weren't worried that someone was going to take a job away from someone else, or outshine the other guy. We all had our strong suits, things we wanted to work on. And I think we pretty much did that. It was competitive in the sense that you knew that if you were screwing off, and you saw one of the other guys working hard or making some money or winning recognition, you would think, "Yeah, maybe I should be working my ass off a little bit."

Paradox — dancer, secret agent, martial artist, and star of MARVEL PREVIEW #24.

© 1980 MCG
© 1980 MCG

VAL MAYERIK

"Sharing a studio with Chaykin, Starlin and

JIM: *Why did you decide to go back to Ohio?*

VAL: New York City is an amazing place, and I'm glad I lived there, but it just isn't for me. Manhattan is an island of concrete with just four or five arteries to get on or off it. I'm just not used to those constant mazes of buildings and concrete canyons. It as very difficult for me to adjust to, on a day-to-day basis. It might be great for some people but it wasn't that great for me. Also, I had very close family ties in Ohio that I missed. Now I'm only about fifty or sixty miles from where I grew up. As much as we like to think we're upwardly mobile and able to relocate to any given part of the country, it's really not that easy to do if you have any sense of roots at all, which I found that I did. And I didn't really discover that until I left for the period of time that I did. That's not to say that I may not leave Ohio again because I would like to move into the Idaho wilderness, and I might well do that some day. But for now I'm satisfied where I am. I have a house in the country and I just recently got married and it's been a good four years back in Ohio. A lot of good work has come my way. I just think I've found the place where I function best.

JIM: *So you work in the house?*

VAL: I have been working at home, but like I said, that solitary situation can be tough. I have a friend, **Chuck Carter**, who is a cartoonist, and we got a studio together. He's never done a comic book but he's an excellent pen-and-ink artist. He may be inking THE STARLING book.

JIM: *Speaking of STARLING, how did that come about?*

VAL: Right around the time that Steve and I were talking about getting VOID INDIGO moving, he asked me if I wanted to do a back-up story for DESTROYER DUCK. He said, "**Jerry Siegel**, the guy who wrote SUPERMAN, is writing it." I thought "**Jerry Siegel** — great!" It's hard *not* to want to be associated with that name. So far it's been fun and apparently **Dean Mullaney** thinks it's getting enough fan response to give the series it's own monthly title.

JIM: *Did collaborating with one of the co-creators of SUPERMAN intimidate you at all?*

VAL: No. I have a lot of respect for people who have achieved great things, but I'm not intimidated by them. I'm intimidated by people who can hurt you in the real world. I'm intimidated by my karate instructor. *(Laughter.)* Jerry and I corresponded for awhile. I did a nice little illustration of SUPERMAN for him, as kind of a tribute, to let him know my respect for him setting a whole new precedent in comic books. We sent each other Christmas cards. I'm sure the first time I get out to Los Angeles, **Steve Gerber** will arrange for us to meet.

JIM: *Are there any writers you enjoyed working with in particular?*

VAL: I liked working with **Doug Moench**, and I like working with Steve a lot. Even though we are different in many ways, Steve and I have a lot of similarities, too. The things he thinks are stupid, I usually think are stupid. He may be more vehement about it, and more willing to attack than I am. I'm more willing to live with things. Not that I acquiesce, but Steve is the kind of person who won't let one thing slide by without an

A sorceress is enlisted to solve the mystery of VOID INDIGO.

© 1984 Steve Gerber & Val Mayerik

Simonson was good for keeping psyched up."

appropriate comment. That's what makes his writing so biting and gives it such a texture and grittiness, and that's why I like working with him. I like working with **Bruce Jones**. We've done a few stories that appeared in TWISTED TALES and ALIEN WORLDS, and he usually has a pretty good sense of putting together a nice, one-shot story. There's no writer I really had a bad time with.

JIM: *Well, you're involved with writing. You've written stories for HEAVY METAL that you've drawn yourself.*

VAL: Right. About a year before I moved to New York, HEAVY METAL hit the stands. And I said to myself, "When I get to New York, I've got to work for these people." So I took a whole bunch of paintings, sketches, concepts and everything else to their offices. **Julie Simmons** seemed to like a lot of what she saw, and tried to give me a chance to work whenever feasible, in between all the foreign work they had commitments to publish.

JIM: *I understand you're involved with cable television in Cleveland, now?*

VAL: Three other people and I write, produce and act in some cable programs and we're just getting access to major cable distribution. We don't write things that have major commercial appeal. So we write things that are marketed through Nickelodeon, the arts channel, and other cable outlets. So far we've had pretty good success. We don't get a chance to produce these cable shows that often. Everyone who works on them also works on other jobs. So whenever we can get together to write and shoot these programs, we work for a couple of days without much sleep, just shooting and shooting and shooting and editing, and then we might take a rest for four or five months before we do another one.

Sherlock Holmes, depicted by Val for MARVEL PREVIEW #6.

JIM: *Do you act in these shows?*

VAL: Yeah. I've been acting since high school. I even did some shows here in New York — not major Broadway plays, just stuff to keep me busy. I have no intention to pursue it as a career.

JIM: *Any favorite roles stick in your mind?*

VAL: Well, in the last cable show we did a pretty funny take-off on bad kung-fu films, with bad dubbing and sound effects, and because I'm into karate that was one of the most fun things I've done. I wrote it, directed it, and got to do martial arts in it — almost everything I like to do.

JIM: *The only thing left would be to draw the poster for it. When did you get involved with the martial arts?*

VAL: When I was nineteen years old. I've had lay-off periods, but it's been a pretty big part of my life ever since then

A sample of Val's work for HEAVY METAL: from "Time Out," story and art by Val Mayerik (HEAVY METAL: April 1979).

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BLACK DIAMOND

BLACK DIAMOND created by MIKE FRANKOWICH JR.
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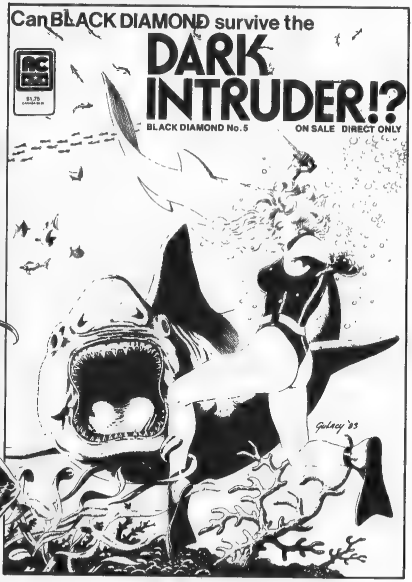
BLACK DIAMOND means mystery, intrigue and exotic adventure as we follow the exploits of Tiana Mathews, the beautiful but dangerous lady spy. Every issue finds **BLACK DIAMOND** in the thick of it battling foreign spies, the agents of QUANSA, terrorists and the like

The back-up strip is **COLT**, the voluptuous masked weapons mistress.

STORY: DON SEDGWICK
ART: MIKE FRANKOWICH



LOOK AT US NOW!

"Karate gives me a sense of what real combat is."

JIM: *What initially attracted you to karate?*

VAL: Primarily the discipline and the tradition. I like the self-defense aspect of it, too, but if all I wanted to get out of it was fighting, I probably would have gone into boxing. But karate introduced me to a whole new way of looking at combat — it's not just knocking the guy out. It expands your awareness of how the body works, and reveals an understanding of how the body, mind and spirit can become more harmonious with one another. There are so many things the martial arts do for you, depending on what you want to get out of it. It's a multi-dimensional kind of endeavor. Besides that, it simply is my favorite kind of exercise.

JIM: *Were you ever worried about hurting your drawing hand?*

VAL: No, because I've never engaged in breaking things with my hands. One time I did break a bone in my hand, but it was actually the result of a stupid accident on my part. Other than that I've had no serious injury, to my hand or any other body part. There's also the danger, in sparring, of taking too many blows to the head, which might hurt my vision, so my sparring sessions are very controlled, with limited or light contact to the head area. Precautions have to be taken. I can't go at it like some guys, whose whole life is the martial arts. They don't care what they do to themselves.

JIM: *Have you ever found that in any way karate has influenced you in your comic work or your artwork?*

VAL: You mean, transferring what I know about martial arts to comics? Not that much. I used to have Ka -Zar do some karate. He used to do things like get in close with an enemy and all of a sudden pull a leg sweep on him — kick the guy's legs out from under him. I used to have Conan do the same stuff. It was kind of subtle. I never had any real flashy stuff in there. I never had any desire to do any of the martial arts comics, like POWER MAN AND IRON FIST, because the costumed aspect and a lot of the storylines didn't appeal to me. Also, a lot of the people who were writing that stuff really didn't know much about the martial arts. Shang-Chi would kick at a guy, miss, hit a building, and bricks would fly. ***(Laughter.)*** I don't care who you are — when a person's foot hits a building, bones break. I just couldn't swallow that kind of stuff and I sure didn't want to draw it. The martial arts gave me a sense of what combat really is. I've always liked the way **John Buscema** choreographed fights. The fighters stood rooted to the earth. You could just watch his characters shift their weight from foot to foot and back away from their opponents, and that's basically what I like to get across in a fight scene. To show that these people have gravity and weight, and that maintaining your balance and utilizing gravity — not how high you can jump — is really what's going to determine if you win the fight.

JIM: *Sometimes the way comic-book fights are choreographed makes the whole difference between being just another dull fight-scene and an exciting action sequence. Kirby has his own way of doing it where he's going for the super-human rather than the 'realistic,' and he's done some incredible fight scenes, like the one between the Thing and the Hulk . . .*

VAL: Oh, yeah!

JIM: . . . *but when you get down to more human-type characters, in films or comics, the more believable it is, the more you'll like it. When you see a kung-fu movie and you can tell the people know what they're doing, it shows and makes an incredible difference, no matter how ludicrous the plot is. Whereas when people aren't that skilled, it just looks like acrobatics.*

VAL: Exactly.

JIM: *You never believe at any point that anyone is ever going to get hurt — even with the amount of blows they take.* (Laughter.)

VAL: Sometimes it's not even how skilled the actors are but how these fight scenes are directed. There are two fight scenes in two entirely different movies that always stick in my memory as truly realistic martial-arts fight scenes. One is in BILLY JACK, where he takes on about twenty guys in a park. That was very realistic, because in the end they got him, which is just what would happen. And in ENTER THE DRAGON, **Bruce Lee**'s best film, some stuff was far out, but some of the one-on-one fights, like the one with the guy who killed his sister, was real, solid, no garbage. It was feasible. It could happen. The stuff he did would hurt you. And he did it with such speed and timing and expertise that it was great to watch. And when you think of it, none of that stuff

Fight scene drawn by Val Mayerik for VOID INDIGO #1.

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VAL MAYERIK

Steve Gerber: "People who eat puppies

he did with **Bob Wall** in that scene would look that dynamic in a comic. He never did a flying kick. He did that real quick backfist punch in the beginning of the fight, and there was such a short distance of thrust there would be almost no way to illustrate in a comic how really dynamic that movement was.

JIM: *Have you ever wanted to do a karate or kung-fu character of your own creation?*

VAL: I'm sure someday I would like to invent a comic-book character who has martial arts skills, and an adventure story in which he would be able to utilize them, but in terms of a martial arts character, I don't know. Up to this point I've never had an interest in developing such a character. I guess because it's just too real to me. It's part of my daily life, and it means a lot to me, and I realize I'd probably have to do things to it to make it sell that I wouldn't want to do.

The story I'm working on now, with a friend of mine, involves a guy who's a kind of rugged individualist and finds himself victimized by a lot of external circumstances he can't control. He finds himself in a primitive, savage situation he's either going to have to sink or swim in. The strength of his character leads him to the realization and the insight that you can never control your environment — totally — but you can control yourself. And the more self-control you have the more ability you have to see the Big Picture — where you stand in the scheme of things — the less adversarial your external environment will be to you. So by arriving at that insight, the character manages to overcome many things. It's a bit of a message story. There's a lot of high adventure in it. I'd like to do it as a graphic novel. Maybe in a year, even less, I could get working on it.

JIM: *Do you have any long-term goals or plans?*

VAL: I'd like to keep expanding as an artist, and keep trying to progress as a mainstream illustrator. Not that I want to leave comics necessarily. It's just that I have other interests and I'd like to pursue them when I have the time, when it's realistic and when I could possibly even make something of a living at them. I'd like to travel more, I hope to get my new karate school going soon, and I hope to have kids soon. Now that I've gotten back to Ohio I'm pretty down-to-earth, so even though I'm involved in these cable productions, I have no illusions that it's going to make us all big stars or all rich. We're doing it because we like to do it and because we have the opportunity and the good fortune to be able to do it. Other than that I just have to keep plugging away in comics.

Jhagur: Vengeance is his!

STEVE GERBER says...

DAK: *What is VOID INDIGO?*

STEVE GERBER: It's a heroic fantasy or sword-and-sorcery series, set in the present day. The laws of the universe haven't changed since the Hyborian Age — magic still exists. Examples of that kind of magic are called "paranormal" or parapsychological experiences — the kind of thing that people brush up against daily, like *déja vu.* And there's reincarnation, too.

DAK: *I guess this is a question that you get asked a lot, but where does the title come from?*

STEVE: Yeah, that is a question that I get asked a lot. Unfortunately, I don't have a real good answer for it. *(Laughter.)* The title came out of nowhere. It seemed appropriate. I'm tempted to say, "It has a good beat, and you can dance to it." I liked the rhythm of the title. I don't even know where the phrase came from — the words sort of put themselves together in my mind. Void Indigo is the realm of the spirit, where spirits go when they have been liberated from their bodies.

DAK: *Why did you choose Val to be the artist?*

STEVE: I really enjoyed working with him in the past, on HOWARD THE DUCK, MAN-THING, and a few other stories we did together. I just like his work. It has a very quirky quality that I felt would be exceptionally suited to this strip. He doesn't draw the standard heroes and villains. You get people with faces, with unusual physiques, and unusual expressions and bodily stances.

DAK: *Is this an open-ended series or is it limited?*

STEVE: It's going to be interesting to find that out. I don't know at the moment. It's intended to go on for as long as it goes on. If the storyline comes to a conclusion in my mind, that would be it. There's no set number of issues, so it's not a limited series to that extent. The graphic novel is essentially the first issue of the series. It introduces the series, tells the origin story and introduces two major characters. We're dealing with reincarnation, and at least one of the two major characters had thousands of personalities in the past — thousands of names and thousands of identities. The graphic novel explores all the physical and metaphysical bases of the series, and the first issue of the Epic Comic series picks up from there.

DAK: *What's the tone of the series? Is it pretty straight, or is it gonzo?*

STEVE: I think that's going to depend on the attitude of the person reading it. It's not played for laughs at all. It's a very serious, very dark series — when I say "heroic fantasy," I'm talking about the **Robert E. Howard** definition, of a barbaric hero in a barbaric milieu with elements of horror and sword-and-sorcery. It's a very violent series, and very — strange to say — realistic, despite all the fantastic elements in it. The story starts in one of those lost ages of man, proceeds to a space-opera sequence, and winds up in the 1980s, all within the span of the graphic novel.

Several themes emerge. One of them is that human beings can be fairly vicious creatures in pursuit of their own self-interest, and that sometimes the only way to stop that sort of viciousness, is by attacking it in kind. So there's certainly a vengeance theme. Pleasant, isn't it? Think we could sell this to the Electric Company? *(Laughter.)* I think all the merchandising will be done in survival stores.

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may enjoy VOID INDIGO." *(Laughter.)*

DAK: *What about the hero's earlier, different personalities? How do they figure in?*

STEVE: They're not different, actually. One of the basic tenets of reincarnation is that the essential nature of the individual does not change, through all the incarnations. It remains the same. What is in fact going on in the reincarnation process is a kind of refinement, in a sense — a reaching for perfection. The theory of reincarnation I'm using is not the standard Hindu theory of reincarnation. The Hindus and the Jains believe that all souls are reincarnated, but there is another theory that reincarnation is the exception rather than the rule. That is, if there is some disruption in the original life that causes the earthly mission of the person not to be fulfilled, then that person is reincarnated to attempt that mission again. That's basically the theory we are using here.

DAK: *So you're back at Marvel.*

STEVE: **Well** . . . I wouldn't go *that* far! *(Laughter.)* They're publishing my work again.

DAK: *That's interesting considering how estranged you were.*

STEVE: We were about as estranged as a company and an individual could get.

DAK: *But apparently you both have come to terms — you're willing to work there, and they're willing to publish your work.*

STEVE: Under the terms of the deal my agent, **Mike Friedrich**, and I have with Epic Comics, yes. The arrangement we worked out is, as far as I can see, one of the best deals in comics at the moment. With Marvel's regular line, creative control would be a big problem. We are discussing a new HOWARD THE DUCK series and if everything can be worked out it's possible I would do that series again, for Marvel.

DAK: *What about a HOWARD movie, which I keep hearing about?*

STEVE: The character has been optioned, and I will be working as a creative consultant, shaping the story.

DAK: *Is it animated?*

STEVE: No, live-action. Doing Howard live-action is really no more complicated than doing Yoda or E.T. In fact, in many ways it's easier. I don't even think they'd find it difficult.

DAK: *Is there anything that we didn't cover about VOID INDIGO that you want to get on the record?*

STEVE: Yes, and this is the one comment that probably will be repeated everywhere, but I really *want* it to be repeated everywhere. This is not going to be a series for everybody. It is, a very, very dark series and is not going to appeal to the people who like stories that could be described as "warm and caring." And those people would do themselves and me a favor if they didn't go near it.

DAK: *So, the fans of THE NEW ADVENTURES OF THE PUPPY shouldn't read VOID INDIGO.*

STEVE: No. People who *eat* puppies may enjoy VOID INDIGO *(Laughter.)* I would just as soon avoid the inevitable complaints from people who pick these books up and decide to be offended. To those people, I say: Don't buy the series. Don't even be curious about the series. Don't come near it. Forget it exists. And leave me alone, okay? *(Laughter.)*

"VOID INDIGO is a very violent series," says Steve.

To people offended by violence in comics, Steve says: "Don't even go near VOID INDIGO." This person didn't listen.

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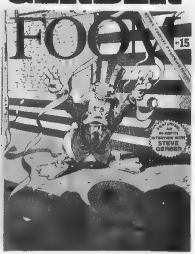
EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT

STEVE GERBER



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The first, the original Gerber-Kraft comics confab! An all-encompassing, no-punches-pulled conversation about comics, conducted at the height of Steve's celebrity as the creator of HOWARD THE DUCK and writer of THE DEFENDERS, OMEGA THE UNKNOWN and, yes, even KISS. His thoughts on the art and craft of creating comics in a startling, straight-from-the-shoulder interview style surprising in a "house organ" like Marvel's FOOM MAGAZINE (at the time, Stan Lee said he ought to have my head in a basket — but he let the interview stand).

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"Some people are convinced I'm an intruder

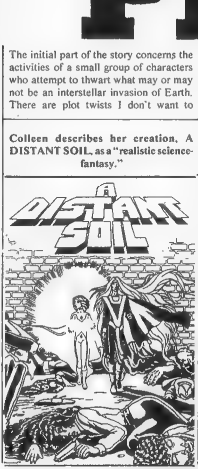
COLLEEN DORAN & RICHARD PINI

I met Colleen Doran at a convention in Norfolk, Virginia, where she was sporting a button that read "Element Lad Is Not Gay." Looking at her portfolio, I was impressed with the detail she put into her work. Now, she is contributing the plot and art for A DISTANT SOIL, which is being scripted by her publisher, Richard Pini of WaRP Graphics. (For an in-depth interview with Richard and his wife, artist Wendy Pini, see COMICS INTERVIEW #5 and #6.)

I spoke to Colleen and Richard prior to their visiting Benders, a comics shop in Hampton, Virginia, for an autograph session. With short notice to prepare, and no sleep in thirty-eight hours, I proceeded to ask what I hoped were coherent questions . . .

BRIAN TALLEY: *Where did the basic idea for A DISTANT SOIL come from?*
COLLEEN DORAN: I hit my head one day and it came to me. *(Laughter.)*
BRIAN: *How much of the plot are you willing to tell?*
COLLEEN: None
BRIAN: *Not a bit?*
COLLEEN: Richard can, but I won't.
RICHARD PINI: The basic plot is in two parts. *(Long pause.)* I'll try to do this in twenty-five words or less. *(Laughter.)* The initial part of the story concerns the activities of a small group of characters who attempt to thwart what may or may not be an interstellar invasion of Earth. There are plot twists I don't want to reveal that will make ambiguity clear. Beyond that initial plot, further issues will follow the adventures of these characters, either singularly or in groups, have adventures in different parts of the world or universe. But it won't be a continuing group of characters like the Avengers, where everybody participates in every adventure.

Colleen describes her creation, A DISTANT SOIL, as a "realistic science-fantasy."



BRIAN: *Will the cast be changing, or will there be a set cast of characters?*
RICHARD: There is a set cast, but it has fuzzy outlines. The cast will change as a result of things that happen to it. The changes won't be arbitrary, like in THE AVENGERS, where every fifty issues they decide "Hey, we're stale! We need a new line up. Let's dump a half dozen a members and go to the Manhattan phone book and look under 'Superheroes' to see who's available to be replacements."
BRIAN: *I wondered how they did that.*
RICHARD: I hope I didn't give anything away, but the characters themselves evolve and so the group evolves and changes.
COLLEEN: The characters will grow up — they don't remain static. The mainstream companies have set characters who more or less have to stay the same. Superman can't undergo any big changes. Most of our characters are young, so they will go through some definite personality changes, and just like everyone else, they

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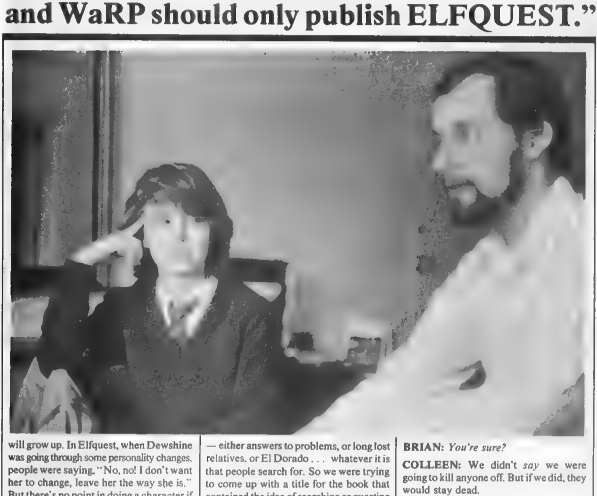
and WaRP should only publish ELFQUEST."



will grow up. In Elfquest, when Dewshine was going through some personality changes, people were saying, "No, no! I don't want her to change, leave her the way she is." But there's no point in doing a character if that character can't evolve.

RICHARD: When Colleen and I were hashing out what the title of the series would be, we knew that the characters, either individually or in groups, would be searching for various and sundry things — either answers to problems, or long lost relatives, or El Dorado . . . whatever it is that people search for. So we were trying to come up with a title for the book that contained the idea of searching or questing — "quest" being taken. *(Laughter.)* The only thing that I could think of was to go to ROGET'S THESAURUS and look under "search" and see if any of the words suggested a good title. None of them did, but this particular edition had a section of quotes at the bottom of each page, and one quote was from a poem by **Thomas Gray**. The line was, "To seek your hero in a distant soil." A little light went on and I said "That's it!" Because a character is looking for something on another planet, on another part of the Earth, all of these "soils" are distant, relative to the person doing the searching. It's a very symbolic and literate title. We just talked about characters evolving and growing. Well, in seeking their particular heroes in whatever distant soil they may be going to, these characters are going to learn about themselves and the world around them. In some cases, they may or may not survive the experience.

COLLEEN: Now you'll send people out into a panic. "Oh God, don't kill off these characters!"

BRIAN: *Another death book . . .*

COLLEEN: And they would stay dead.

BRIAN: *You're sure?*

COLLEEN: We didn't *say* we were going to kill anyone off. But if we did, they would stay dead.

RICHARD: And death is an evolution of sorts.

BRIAN: *Colleen, how would you describe A DISTANT SOIL?*

COLLEEN: It's a little hard to describe. Some of the characters are strictly science-

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Colleen Doran
Occupation: Cartoonist
Birth: 24 July 1963 — Cincinati, Ohio
Residence: Seaford, Virginia (no, it's probably not on the map)
Interests: Biology, Celtic History, Politics, Pre-Raphaelitism, Contemporary Realism, Arthurian Legends, Science Fiction, and actor Judson Scott *(sigh)*.
Pet Peeve: People who wear house slippers that make loud scuffing or flopping noises when they walk.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Richard Pini
Occupation: Publisher, Writer, Editor
Birth: Long, long, ago in a galaxy far, far away. (Actually, 19 July 1950 — New Haven, Connecticut)
Credits: $3.26 to the dollar, as of last Friday.
Favorite Comic Book Story: FANTASTIC FOUR #51, "This Man, This Monster" — pure Lee/Kirby.
Pet Peeve: People and events that waste time.

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"I don't think readers — especially women — are interested in page after page of fighting."

fiction characters, so I have tried to work out science-fiction origins for them, and other characters are strictly fantasy and some others are very real. What I've done is taken elements from the *genres* I enjoy and put them into one pot, as it were. I suppose I'd describe it as "realistic science-fantasy," which sounds like a major contradiction in terms. When I wrote this way back when, I wrote it for myself, so I was very cautious about having it published because the story is rather personal.

BRIAN: *Richard, did you co-plot the book?*

RICHARD: The plot is hers. We have plotting sessions where I sit with a little tape recorder, and we go over the plot point by point and action by action, and I make notes to myself on the tape recorder. It's essentially her feeding the plot to me and me hopefully asking the right questions to ferret out the fine points. Then I take the tape home and write a full script. She will have done layouts first, and we will have used those for the basis of the plotting session, *then* I take the layouts and my notes home and do the full script, then she does the art, then it goes to the letterer and hopefully it all comes out.

BRIAN: *Colleen, you are something of a rarity in that you are a female drawing a comic book. You can count all the women drawing comics on your hands and still have fingers left over. Why do you suppose there are so few women drawing comics?*

COLLEEN: I guess it's because for so long comics were geared toward young boys. Until recently, there hasn't been much attention given to women's interest in comics. People think readers want to see nothing but slam-bang fights, but I don't think readers — especially women — are really interested in page after page of fighting.

BRIAN: *You told me at a convention you showed someone from one of the major companies your work, and after you walked away they said, "Funny, she doesn't draw like a girl."*

COLLEEN: Yeah — what the hell kind of statement was that? How is a girl supposed to draw? According to **John Clifton**, with a flair for design and decorativeness. It's supposed to be a trademark of girls' art — I don't know why. I think there's no such thing as a trademark for girls' drawing. I think the only trait that might run through women's art is sensitivity, which I think a lot of men are afraid to show because of society's attitudes. There are a lot of feminine-style male artists — **Ingres, Redon, Fragonard**. There are some very masculine-style female artists like **Rosa Bonheur** and **Artemesia Gentileschi.**

The good guys of A DISTANT SOIL, depicted by Colleen Doran.

BRIAN: *What will it take to change those attitudes?*

COLLEEN: Well, I think you have to change the society, and you can't change thousands of years of conditioning in society in just a few years. Some people can't change the way they think because that's the way they were raised. They have the right to think the way they want to, but by the same token, I have the right to do what I want to do.

BRIAN: *Richard, what was it about Colleen's art that caught your eye?*

RICHARD: Three things, two of which are related. One of which is that it was very finely done in pencil. Not that I don't like color comics, but I think the black and white format has been neglected — steamrolled by four-color. Elfquest is in black and white and it has done very well, thank you, and I think that A DISTANT

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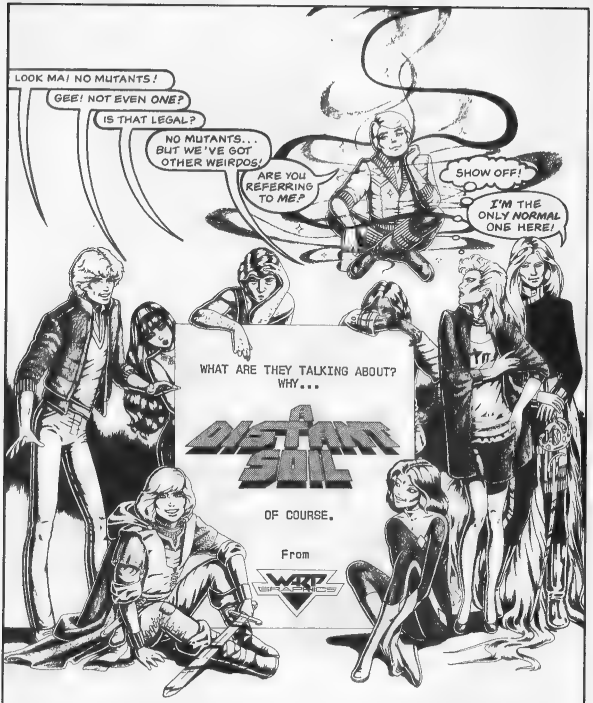

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"Artists told me, 'We don't think you can make it. You don't have the guts."

SOIL will do very well. It's different, but it's still black and white, and I have a fondness for that mode of graphic expression.

The other two, that are related, are that having seen a lot of portfolios shown by a lot of young and not-so-young hopefuls wanting to break into comics, I've realized that there are a lot of artists out there who do not know the rudiments of anatomy. I like to see art where the muscles are in the right places and not over-exaggerated, and not copies of **Kirby** or **Adams** or **Starlin** or **Frank Miller** or whoever. Colleen's own style was very refreshing.

COLLEEN: I've been told that I don't have a style, that my work is too cerebral and my rendering is too academic. And that the figures seem too rigid.

RICHARD: To an extent, but at the same time where there *is* motion in the figures, that motion is so natural and so real that it's a sheer joy to behold. There's still a fair amount of rigid posing in some of the figures. But I think that after an issue or two that is going to soften up and become natural motion as opposed to frame-to-frame stop-motion.

BRIAN: *Has her art evolved much since you first saw it?* (Laughter.)

COLLEEN: Oh, wow!

BRIAN: *That much?*

RICHARD: It's evolved strongly, within just a few months between the insert that appeared in ELFQUEST #16, and the art for the first issue of DISTANT SOIL. I figure if the professionalism grows every issue for the first half dozen, what will we have wrought?

BRIAN: *Was Richard the first person that you showed your work to?*

COLLEEN: To be quite honest, I wasn't sure at that point that I was going to do comics. I pretty much wanted to be drawing, but I wasn't sure if I wanted to be a science-fiction illustrator or a comic-book artist. I really wanted to be **Kelly Freas**. He is the best there is — he just knocks me out. I had already been praised by Kelly and a couple of other science-fiction artists — who had said, "Give her a couple of years and she'll be really good" — when I went to my first comic-book convention and met **Bob Layton**. I showed him all of my comic book stuff, and he looked it over and he hemmed and hawed and said, "Nothing here shows me that you can do comics." Well, I didn't say anything then, but I went home and was very angry. "How dare he say that, nobody ever said that they didn't like my work." But it got me angry enough to decide, "I'm going to show him." I think being told you can't do something is a lot more influential than being told you can. A couple of artists told me, "We don't think you can make it because you don't have the guts." *(Laughter.)*

BRIAN: *Did you have much training?*

COLLEEN: I had a few courses in college. I had an independent art study class, and I used the inset for my final.

BRIAN: *Did you take any flak in school because of your interest in comics? My wife and family think I'm nuts for reading them.*

COLLEEN: One teacher said, "You have so much talent, why do you want to do that stuff?" I'd watch her get all flustered.

BRIAN: *The insert was shot from the pencils. Will all other issues be done that way too?*

COLLEEN: I hope so.

BRIAN: *Do you have any desire to have an inker work on it?*

COLLEEN: I don't, but Richard does. He wants me to learn to ink.

RICHARD: Now, let's clear this up. It's not that I want you to learn to ink so that you can ink DISTANT SOIL. It's just that inking is one of the things that eventually you will have to know. But as far as DISTANT SOIL is concerned, I like the look of the half-tone pencils very much.

Kelly Freas is one of Colleen's artistic idols. However, Kelly complained that this caricature of him, drawn by Colleen, made him look too tall.

© 1983 Colleen Doran

"I don't care what COMICS JOURNAL

Nobody, with the peculiar exception of NATHANIEL DUSK, is doing anything like it. I find it interesting that NATHANIEL DUSK appeared about the same time as DISTANT SOIL #1. I think that DUSK is an interesting and possibly noble experiment. What the results of it will be, I can't predict.

COLLEEN: It would have been fine if they hadn't used such garish colors.

RICHARD: This is a complaint that you're hearing more and more, especially with the higher quality paper — the complaint of garish colors.

BRIAN: *Whose fault is that? The colorist, or the editor for saying, "Spice it up"?*

RICHARD: I think it's the fault of putting them on the expensive paper when comics were made to be done on cheap paper because it dulls the color.

BRIAN: *Bob Sharen told me that he hopes everything goes to Baxter, because it eliminates the mud that you get with the newsprint.*

RICHARD: Well, you're juggling with some very unwieldy things. For their entire history, comics have been printed on pulp newsprint, but the pulp paper you could buy got worse and worse. So the colorists and printers, I imagine had to pump up the color to compensate for that. Now, suddenly, books are being done on Mando, which is better newsprint stock, or Baxter, or Hudson, or all the different types of bright white paper. And the word hasn't filtered down to the colorists and printers that all of these ultra-bright colors that you had to use on the poor-quality newsprint are going to blow your eyeballs out the back of your head on this high-quality paper. I'd like to think that sooner or later — hopefully sooner — that the production people in comics will realize that you can tone down the color and get a very pleasing result.

BRIAN: *Any examples come to mind?*

RICHARD: The best examples in recent memory were certain covers on MARVEL FANFARE that were exquisitely colored. One that comes to mind was issue #6, the **Craig Russell** cover of the Scarlet Witch holding Spider-Man.

BRIAN: *Do you think the continued use of "garish" color will turn more people to the black and white books?*

RICHARD: That's a tricky one to call, because the weight of momentum is behind the color comics. I an hoping, as a publisher of black-and-white books, having established an audience for black and white through ELFQUEST, to maintain that audience for other publications. I think it's a very valid, very good-looking art form.

COLLEEN: I think the other companies should look at NEXUS. I love the color work on it.

RICHARD: NEXUS was done with a different style of coloring — more subtle.

BRIAN: *Colleen, who has influenced you, as far as art-styles go?*

COLLEEN: Surprisingly, not many comic artists. I suppose we are influenced to some extent by everyone's work we see. As far as artists I admire, there's **Kelly Freas, Norman Rockwell, Artemesia, Rosetti,** also **Jeff Jones.** And in comics, **Wendy Pini,** of course, one reason being that she's a woman — you know, "Wow, look, I can do it too!" And **Barry Smith, Craig Russell, Russ Heath,** and the **John Byrne** of old.

BRIAN: *What about the John Byrne of today?*

COLLEEN: It looks to me like he does very, very rough sketches and then just slap-dashes inks on them. He used to do such nice work. The characters had real form and mass. The women were voluptuous and the men were solid. You could see their relationships in form and space, and that's not the case anymore. His characters were graceful. Even the hands he drew had a lot of grace. He's really disappointed me. It looks like he's not even trying. I think he's overloaded and should cut down.

BRIAN: *What will the production schedule be for A DISTANT SOIL?*

RICHARD: It's going to be three times a year to start. The reason is to give Colleen a time-cushion if there are any snags.

COLLEEN: Good Lord! Anything that could have gone wrong did go wrong with the first issue. The artist almost died!

A drawing of Sir Galahad, by Colleen Doran

© 1985 Colleen Doran

says! Who died and left them in charge?"

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Colleen is a devoted LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES fan.

Here's her rendition of Element Lad.

RICHARD: If time permits, and her skill develops to where she can go a little faster, we will go quarterly.

BRIAN: *Has response to the insert in ELFQUEST been positive?*

RICHARD: Nine to one in favor. In traveling around to various conventions and talking to fans and dealers, everybody seemed to be looking forward to it with great anticipation.

BRIAN: *COMICS JOURNAL hasn't gotten hold of it yet?*

COLLEEN: I don't care what COMICS JOURNAL says! Who died and left them in charge? I don't think I should be intimidated into thinking that they are the be-all and end-all of knowledge. I think it's good to get other people's opinions, but I don't like their general attitude toward not only rival books, but toward the people in the business. They seem to think that they can elevate themselves by making everyone else look smaller in comparison. I think it's a very nasty attitude. I do read COMICS JOURNAL. I think on occasion they have some good reviews. I particularly liked **Heidi MacDonald's** review of DAZZLER. Every time I want to have a good laugh, I re-read that review — it's hilarious. On the other hand, some of the reviews are so scathing and unfounded, that I wish they would temper them with a bit of kindness.

BRIAN: *Was there any feedback from the other companies after the insert came out?*

COLLEEN: Not a whole lot. Most pros I know seem to be reserving comment. But the response from friends and fans has been loud and varied. I'm finding out that this notoriety is becoming a two-edged sword. On one hand, now that I'm published, people seem to think my work is much more valuable. I had one piece that I had been trying to sell for five years, and then after the insert came out, it sold for five times the asking price. On the other hand, from other people I've sensed jealousy, suspicion, and downright hostility. Some people are firmly convinced that I am an intruder into the WaRP Graphics world, and that Wendy and Richard shouldn't publish anything besides ELFQUEST. Sometimes I feel like a third leg.

Sketch of Bast, a character from A DISTANT SOIL.

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RICHARD: There's an interesting phenomenon that happens to anybody as soon as they become published.

COLLEEN: You get enemies you never heard of before.

RICHARD: Also, you get attention that you either don't want, or that you didn't know was out there. Your skill has not changed from five minutes prior to publication to five minutes after publication, but the fact that you are now public property gains you things that you never knew were there.

COLLEEN: I get free comics these days! *(Laughter.)*

BRIAN: *How do you feel about all this attention? I know it's old hat for Richard, but . . .*

COLLEEN: I'm going to have to get used to it. I'm not really thrilled with it right now.

BRIAN: *Oh, okay, I'm sorry.* (Begins to leave).

COLLEEN: Bye, Brian! *(Laughter.)* No, the thing I don't like is that your friends treat you differently. People that you have known for years come up and ask you for your autograph, or for favors, or give you things. At conventions, dealers will say, "Oh, you've been looking at that comic, why don't you go ahead and take it."

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"I was really freaking out for a while."

BRIAN: *Be sure you look at some of the hundred-dollar Carl Barks sets from Russ Cochran — make it worthwhile. Is there any improvement you think your work needs at this point?*

COLLEEN: I wish my characters were less rigid, and I wish I had more experience drawing them. I've given each character a different face, but drawing it in pencil, and doing full rendering is almost like doing a full portrait. That makes it harder. Line drawings would be much easier than what I'm doing. Sometimes when you have a character, adding shading distorts it. So I've got to get used to drawing all kinds of people. Different ethnic types, tall people, short people, fat, skinny — all types. It's all a lot harder than I thought.

RICHARD: Going back to what we were talking about earlier, I would say that some of the stiffness and rigidity has to soften. But the amount of improvement from the insert to the first issue leads me to believe very strongly that I won't have to stand over her with a bullwhip and say, "Soften up those characters! Get them to move more naturally!"

COLLEEN: I didn't know you were into that!

RICHARD: Works wonders. *(Laughter.)* The softening will evolve naturally.

BRIAN: *Colleen, are you terribly critical of yourself?*

COLLEEN: Yes. I don't like anything I've ever done for more that five minutes after I've done it. I'm just honest with myself. People think I'm critical of myself, and sometimes I might be, but if you don't see the problems in you work, then you can't improve it.

RICHARD: There's a point each artist gets to where self-criticism and self-confidence are in balance. Go beyond that point and you get smug. Colleen's still on the side of that fence where she's over-critical. That's useful to a point, but eventually you need a nicely balanced equilibrium.

BRIAN: *As long as you don't get to the "ego" stage.*

COLLEEN: I don't think I could. I've got a couple of parents that know when to take me down a peg, and I'm sure Richard will give me a good kick in the butt when I need it.

BRIAN: *Well, he's got the whip.* (Laughter.) *You work at home and you go to school. Do your career and your education get in each other's way?*

COLLEEN: They really do. The insert was due about a week before exams. It's hard to explain to a professor, "Sorry, I have to go to work." Things really got a bit hectic and I was really freaking out for a while. Finally, I had to take a year off from school.

BRIAN: *How fast do you work? Are you pleased with your speed?*

COLLEEN: I wish I was faster, but I put a lot into each page. I've got to the point where I can do a page a day, but that's pushing it. I like to do a page every two days.

BRIAN: *Will the art contain a lot of background work?*

COLLEEN: I don't think we used that much background in the insert.

Another member of the Legion of Super-Heroes: the White Witch.

Art by Colleen Doran.

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MEGATON MAN JOINS KITCHEN SINK LINE-UP!
IT'S GREAT BEING ON THE KITCHEN SINK TEAM!
SO! WHAT ARE YOUR SUPER-POWERS?
FIRST ISSUE IN SEPTEMB
FULL COLOR
AXTER
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DONALD SIMPSON '84
SO MUCH FOR A HOUSE STYLE!

"I'm sure Richard will give me a good kick in the butt when I need it." *(Laughter.)*

RICHARD: It's illusion, but a very powerful illusion. There is not a whole lot of background, but she does such fully-rendered artwork that a lot is implied with very little. Two or three smudges of darkness against a blank background can imply a brick wall. You think there's a lot there.

BRIAN: *Nothing from the John Byrne school — two figures and no background?*

COLLEEN: Well, no, I will try to put something in the background unless I want to balance the page. Too much background can make the page look busy. I do wish I had the ability to work as fast as **Byrne** does.

BRIAN: *How far ahead are you plotted?*

COLLEEN: I've got the whole thing plotted, and I've outlined through issue #6. By that issue we will know if anyone is buying the book and whether or not we should continue.

BRIAN: *How many issues are planned?*

COLLEEN: I really couldn't tell you. When we started this thing I thought, "This will be over in five or six issues, no problem." When I finally wrote it down, it was, "Oh, I forgot to put this in! This, too! This will be great for character development, so let's put that in, too!" The basic plot is still there, it's just been elaborated on, so it looks like this particular storyline might run as long as ELFQUEST. The chore gets bigger. It's like a bad piece of meat — it gets bigger and bigger the more you chew it. Up to this point I've been writing all the stories for myself, so I would know the backgrounds of the characters and wouldn't have to elaborate on them, but now I've got to let everyone else know who they are.

RICHARD: It is open-ended like ELFQUEST, but closed like ELFQUEST is, too. If we were continuing ELFQUEST beyond #20, the characters still exist and could go on to further adventures. So DISTANT SOIL will go fifteen or twenty or however many issues it takes to tell this story, and in that sense it is closed — but then the characters can branch out.

BRIAN: *What has the order been for the first issue?*

RICHARD: Twenty thousand copies, which is not X-MEN, but it's better than a lot of comics start out. I am satisfied with it, and people I have spoken to believe that it will catch on, knock wood. *(Knocks wood.)* It will depend on getting people to appreciate the black-and-white format, Colleen's art style and the storyline.

COLLEEN: If the book doesn't become a big fan favorite I won't be too disappointed. I can always become a computer programmer, or go back to what I was doing before, writing stories for myself. I hope it does well, but I'm not worried about making a million dollars or becoming as popular as the X-MEN.

RICHARD: She's got a whole collection of matchbook covers with job offers on them at home. *(Laughter.)* So if DISTANT SOIL doesn't sell, there are fifteen different things she can do.

BRIAN: *Overall, are you pleased with what has gone on so far?*

RICHARD: So far, yes. I've often been asked about ELFQUEST, "What's your favorite issue?" The answer, of course, is, "The next one." I was pleased with the way DISTANT SOIL #1 has turned out. I know that I was more pleased with number two, and then even more pleased with three, and so on.

BRIAN: *Anything either of you would like to toss in? I feel sleep slowly creeping up on me.*

COLLEEN: I am starving!

BRIAN: *Let's go get elfburgers!*

RICHARD: Hey, watch your mouth, fella. *(Laughter.)* Yes, I have something to tell the readers: Buy our books. We're starving. We need the money. Seriously, though . . . WaRP Graphics has plans for another couple of books beyond ELFQUEST and A DISTANT SOIL. I hope people go for them all, even if not in the numbers that go for the four-color comics. I hope we can influence people to appreciate the black and white format. I think it's valid and I think it has a lot to say — quite a lot.

Art by Colleen Doran, Wendy Pini and M. Lucie Chin for the cover of A DISTANT SOIL #3.

© 1984 Colleen Doran and WaRP Graphics, Inc.

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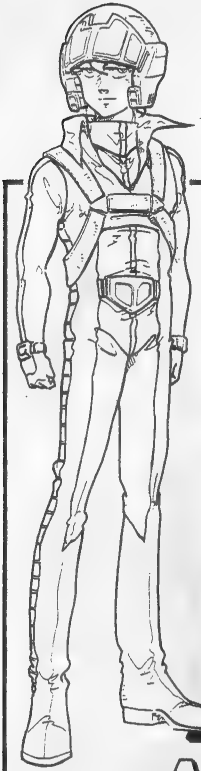

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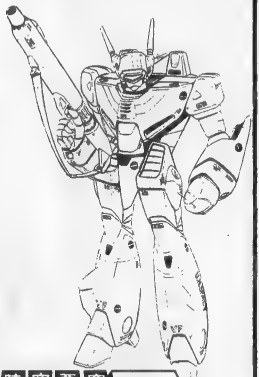

超時空要塞

マクロス

MACROSS

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"I read *all* the Marvels. I didn't want to miss anything in the Marvel Universe."

Photo: Tony Frunt

One of these fellows has possibly the largest Marvel Comics collection in the world.

GEORGE OLSHEVSKY

One of Marvel Comics' most ambitious projects for 1984 is the MARVEL HISTORY — a complete, multi-volume chronicle of the Marvel Universe, from the dawn of time to the present — and beyond! Head historian for this endeavor is George Olshevsky, a man uniquely qualified for the role, not only by his eighteen years as fan and collector (fellow Marvel maven Warren Reece has dubbed George, "King of the Timelys," referring to his complete collection of Timely Comics, Marvel's previous incarnation), but also by his background in research and indexing. George used his knowledge of computers and comics to produce the voluminous, authoritative MARVEL COMICS INDEX — the standard reference work relied upon by both fans and professionals. Lou Mougin, who will be working with George on the MARVEL HISTORY books, spoke to George about this new project, as well as the stormy, calamity-beset story of the INDEX . . .

LOU MOUGIN: *George, what's a mathematics and computer whiz such as yourself doing reading comics?*

GEORGE OLSHEVSKY: Well, I *learned to read* from comic books, so you see my

"Marvel had a unity of concept — a

interest goes way back! The first thing I ever read was a comic book — an early issue of WALT DISNEY'S COMICS AND STORIES. I remember reading some very good Donald Duck and Uncle Scrooge stories. And later I read SUPERMAN, BATMAN, WONDER WOMAN and other DC super-heroes. The first issue of SUPERMAN that I can remember reading was #78, featuring the dragon from Krypton. I stayed with the DC characters until about 1959, then I just couldn't take it — there were too many heroes for my little mind. (Laughter.)

LOU: *Seems ironic now.*

GEORGE: Yeah — now I have to keep track of hundreds of them!

LOU: *Did you by chance happen to read any old Atlas comics?*

GEORGE: Yes, I can remember reading a fair number of them, although I can't remember the issues and dates. I owned a stack of horror comics before the advent of the Comics Code Authority, but my parents found them and threw them out. (Laughter) Most of them were minor publishers, I guess, and many were really gory — people getting their heads lopped off, being burned alive, and so forth. I don't remember whether I owned any ECs, because I wasn't aware of comic publishers as a little kid, but I'll bet I had a few in that stack that was thrown out.

LOU: *Did you ever follow the Marvel heroes?*

GEORGE: No, I never saw them on the stands much. I did see a couple of issues of FANTASTIC FOUR, but I considered Marvel then as a lesser publisher, sort of like the Charlton of the day. I lost interest in comics altogether after high school, and developed other interests — mathematics and computer science. And I got interested in my wife, Andrea. Then about 1966, I was in college at M.I.T. in Boston, and everybody was reading Marvel Comics. "You gotta read these — they're great!" These were very, very intelligent people — and here they were, reading comics!

LOU: *Kinda makes you wonder about the minds of our generation.*

GEORGE: I read an early TALES TO ASTONISH — probably #72 or #73, with Warlord Krang. And I got hooked! The story ended with a "continued next issue," and I *had* to have the next issue, and the next, and next. The thing that I found interesting — besides the amazingly good writing and the sophisticated level of the plots — was that all these Marvels depicted different characters in the *same universe.* There was a unity of concept that permeated the Marvels, a continuity and a background that added great depth to the stories. I started reading *all* the Marvels then, so as not to miss anything happening in the Marvel Universe. Then I went to the University of Toronto and did some postgraduate work in computer programming to explain four-dimensional objects —

LOU: *Hmm . . . I've never seen one of those. (Laughter) Once you got your degrees in math and computer science, George, what kept you interested in Marvels?*

GEORGE: Besides being a comic *reader,* about two years after I got into Marvel. I became a comic *collector* as well. Computer science taught me a sense of organization of large quantities of data, the ability to build files, sort and store information, and other such things. When I was getting my degree at the University of Toronto, I also worked part-time for their Computer Centre, with almost unlimited access to their computer as one of the fringe benefits of my job. I built a little file of punch cards with information about comics in my collection (and which ones were still missing), and I would run it off through the computer from time to time, keeping it up to date. So I made this checklist, through the remainder of the 1960s I went merrily on my way, playing with comics and computers. When I began the computer checklist, there were maybe five or six hundred Marvel stories

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: George Olshevsky
Occupation: Indexer
Born: 12 June 1946 — Karlsurhe, Germany. You might say that my parents were one step ahead of the Communists, who at the time were busy creating their Iron Curtain in Europe. We arrived in the United States when I was 7 months old, and for the next 17 years I lived in Buffalo, NY. I moved to Boston — actually, Cambridge, Mass. — when I was accepted at M.I.T., and haven't lived in Buffalo for any length of time since.
Residence: San Diego, California
Degrees: A Bachelor of Science in Mathematics — *pure* math as opposed to *applied* math—and a Master's in Computer Science.
Credits: MESOZOIC MEANDERINGS (paleontological index), MARVEL COMICS INDEX, the SILVERMANE stories in Windy City's ELRIC (with John Allison), ARIK KHAN #3.

Experience: 18 years as a comics fan — and a complete Timely and Marvel collection.

Interests: Dinosaurs, computers and comics. My main mathematical interest lies in the geometry of four-dimentional objects. You can't ever *really* see one, but my approach was to use a computer to look at three-dimensional sections — or slices — of a four-dimensional object. Only a computer can perform all the calculations needed to create a movie — computer animation — of the changing sections of a four-dimensional object "passing through" our three-dimensional space. When I finished my Master's Thesis, I had a string of 22 movies displaying all six of the regular four-dimensional polytopes (that's a particular kind of object) in all their most symmetric ways. It was one of the things I had been interested in since high school, and it was great to finally be able to get it done!

Favorite Dinosaur: Chunkingosaurus. It's a very interesting stegosaurus which was found in Szechuan, China.

Favorite Comic-Book Series: Geez — anything published by Marvel is pretty high on the list. I'm an unabashed Marvel fan. Stan Lee once awarded me an FFF for my computer indexes, and I still have the letter somewhere. I was going to put FFF after my name when I submitted my doctoral thesis, but I never finished it. I got involved in Publishing. Now I have a professional interest in the Marvels!

I guess I'd have to say the Dr. Strange stories in STRANGE TALES during the 1960s, by Ditko and other artists.

Pet Peeve: Lousy weather — as found on numerous occasions in Canada.

continuity that added depth to the stories."

altogether — about a dozen different titles, each running something like fifty or sixty issues. SPIDER-MAN was up to about issue #60. THE FANTASTIC FOUR up to about #75, something like that.

Once I had the checklist compiled, I was able to seriously consider putting together a complete collection of Marvel comics. What also helped was having a local store that dealt in back issues, namely, Captain George's Memory Lane in Toronto. He had a very good turnover in back issues, and he sold them mainly at a nickle or dime each.

LOU: *I remember those days!*

GEORGE: I think the most expensive item he carried regularly in the store was THE FANTASTIC FOUR #1 for seven dollars.

LOU: *We will now observe a moment of silence. (Laughter.) How did news of the index spread through fandom?*

GEORGE: Here's what happened: My first exposure to an index of any kind was a mimeographed one by a fellow named **Dan Merkur**. It contained an index to Marvel Comics through December 1967. It was available in Captain George's Memory Lane. That was the source that I drew on while compiling my checklist, for the titles or the stories or the comics that I didn't have in my collection. The next index that was published was a version of my computer checklist. Captain George published it on newsprint, and sold it for a quarter. One day I sat down and said "This checklist is no longer adequate."

LOU: *How did you go about updating it?*

GEORGE: First of all, I got all the comic books, and with my roommate, **David Cook**, read them and put down the names of the characters appearing there, who wrote the books, who drew 'em, and so on — for each story in each book. And then a friend of mine, **Leonard Wolinsky**, and I went to a computer center and sat down for several hours punching cards. All of a sudden, a list of about 35 or 40 typewritten pages turned into about 250 pages of computer printout. I thought this was a gas! And every month I would add information as the comics came out. Pretty soon — about 1968 — many Marvel titles, like STRANGE TALES, TALES TO ASTONISH and TALES OF SUSPENSE split up and doubled the number of Marvel books, almost overnight. So my list kept growing and growing and I continued on my merry way until April 1975. My final version then was a 666 page computer print-out, which weighed about 15 pounds!

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The first of the problem-plagued MARVEL COMICS INDEX series. Cover by Ronn Sutton.

Now people had been finding out about this thing by word-of-mouth. I guess from conventions. I would carry it around to conventions and show it, and pretty soon I was getting requests for it. It was no trouble at all to run the tape and generate another print-out of the list. I would pack it up and ship it to whoever wanted it, for the cost of the postage.

LOU: *Did they ever hassle you about computer time?*

GEORGE: No, it doesn't take much computer time. It's about fifteen minutes of printer time, but less than a minute to extract the data from the main file and prepare it for printing. Computers are a good thing as far as getting your data out fast, once your program's completed and once your data's filed.

LOU: *Were the lists selling regularly?*

GEORGE: Yes, I probably sold one a week, and people were finding out more and more about it. So I decided to revamp the list yet again and produce it as a book. I began by revamping my SPIDER-MAN list, which was the first to be printed. I revamped SPIDER-MAN. I revamped CONAN, and I think I was on my way to revamping THE AVENGERS, when I met **Tony Frutti**, who was a collector in Toronto. He and I met when we were bidding against each other for a copy of MARVEL MYSTERY #3 that **Jerry Bails** had offered in an auction. He and I decided to see the index published as a

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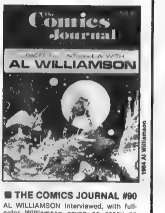

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Special convention issue, publishing panels featuring artists (KANE, SIENKIEWICZ, SIM, KUBERT, CHAYKIN, et al.), editors (GOLD, GOODWIN, et al.), writers (JONES, WOLFMAN, et al.), and a special interview with HARVEY KURTZMAN! Plus reviews, letters, columns, and much more!

■ **THE COMICS JOURNAL #92**

Are undergrounds dead? Features interviews with GILBERT SHELTON and LEONARD RIFAS, a column by DENIS KITCHEN, more. Also, the death of Western Comics, HARLAN ELLISON, the great summer reading, news stories on Marvel's controversial art vaults, and much more!

"Steranko kept us from getting ripped off."

book, but illustrated with pictures of the covers, not just rough data. I said, "We've got to have pictures or people won't buy it." So we wrote to **Stan Lee** to get permission to take pictures of the covers. Stan was familiar with the computer list because Marvel was also buying the computer list from me. They were buying one every three months, so they probably have a stack of print-outs. Anyway, we got permission.

LOU: *I remember Stan mentioned you as "Generous George Olshevsky" in his Bullpen Bulletins.*

GEORGE: Yeah, he plugged the SPIDER-MAN INDEX. Anyhow, Tony put up the money — because he had lots of bucks from his dad — and I put up the information. We had a partnership.

LOU: *How did you get started?*

GEORGE: Well, we found a printer in Toronto. We started out completely ignorant of printing. And both of us had other jobs — Tony worked for his dad and I worked with computers — so we really didn't have the time to put in the effort to produce it at a good price and make a profit at it. It was our hobby. We didn't expect to make any money — we did it just for the love of Marvel Comics, more or less. Well we asked the printer to print 10,000 copies and we got 9,950.

LOU: *Close enough.*

GEORGE: And he took three months! That was a long time, considering he took every short cut. Then he charged us the going rate for a Cadillac job and pocketed the difference! The first thing we did was take the books down to New York City for the Creation Con, in very early January 1976 right after New Year's. Tony and I drove down in an old station wagon loaded with books and had our first experience with Customs and government bureaucracy. Here we were, naive as hell just bringing a few books across the border to sell at a convention for fans, as a hobby enterprise, and they were treating it as if it were Big Business. For a while it seemed like they wouldn't let the books through, because there are restrictions on the sale of books produced outside the United States when you want to sell them in the U.S. When it turned out that Marvel actually held the copyright on everything it was all right. Anyway clearing customs was an unbelievable headache — two babes from incubators encountering the real world for the first time. It was an astounding experience.

LOU: *The cold cruel world of bureaucracy.*

GEORGE: We ran into regulations, customs, government taxes, all the drek that people lay on each other, all the obstacles that people set in the path of progress. Really awful. But got through customs and made it to the convention and set up this little table. Hey, we were going to set the world on fire! We were going to come back with $3,000 and pay the printer! We sold about 55. (Laughter.) So at maybe four bucks a copy we made about $220. Then we went to **Phil Seuling** and **Bud Plant**, who looked at it and said without much enthusiasm, "Yeah, we'll take some." So all of our copies, we sold at substantial wholesaler discount. We were educated very quickly by Bud and Phil about wholesaler's discounts and retailer's discounts and that sort of thing. I hadn't really thought about selling the book through wholesalers; we thought we'd sell them through the mail ourselves. Had we sold them that way, of the ten thousand we had printed, we'd probably have 8,000 still on our hands at this time! People liked the book. We got negative letters in a ratio of about one in fifty. That was when we discovered our *mistakes!*

LOU: *Some of the fans were fanatics since shildhood and they were reading the MARVEL COMICS INDEX and comparing it with their own index and what they remembered.*

GEORGE: That's right. "How come you got it this way, when it should have been *this* way? What are you guys, morons?"

LOU: *I think I was one of those people.*

GEORGE: Anyway, we thought, "We'll go to the printer with the second book of the series."

The cover of MARVEL INDEX #5. Art by Tim Conrad.

© 1977 MCG

"We ran into government, taxes — all the

LOU: *Which was the CONAN INDEX?*

GEORGE: Right. At the Creation Convention, we got in touch with **Tim Conrad**, who was known mainly, then as a **Barry Smith** imitator. I'd seen a dust jacket he'd done for an album — **L. Sprague deCamp** reading **Robert E. Howard** stories — and I thought it was really good, so I thought, "Hey, this guy might do a good job for the cover." We got in touch with him, and he did our CONAN cover and our THOR cover and our DR. STRANGE cover, and they were all great. He did a fabulous job.

We had sold about four or five thousand copies of the SPIDER-MAN INDEX through **Phil Seuling** and **Bud Plant**, and our printing bill was paid at that point. But the printer wanted us to sign a contract. So like fools, we signed. Then I told him to get started on the CONAN book. We were dissatisfied with his layouts for the SPIDER-MAN, so Tony gave him the layouts we wanted. Of course, the printer immediately used this as an excuse to raise the price by several *thousand dollars.* Meanwhile, we wanted a **Neal Adams** cover on THE AVENGERS INDEX. He was very hot then.

LOU: *Right. He still is, if you don't count SKATEMAN.*

GEORGE: Anyway, **Neal** delivered the AVENGERS cover five months late. So when the **Neal Adams** cover didn't show up as scheduled, the printer got on my case for not being on time! I told him not to hassle me about being late since he had been so extremely late with CONAN. We found out later that when he should have been working on our books, he was going around to banks trying to get a loan, on the strength of the contract he had with us, to expand his business. He didn't bother actually doing the work! So, in consequence, THE AVENGERS INDEX turned out months and months late. Bud and Phil had paid for it in advance and they were already grumbling about CONAN. So we had had **Seuling's** money and **Plant's** money for three months without supplying them any books!

LOU: *They must have had a lot of faith.*

GEORGE: Well, their good faith ran out. When it came to the fourth book, they wanted the books *before* they would pay us — so I worked out a deal with them and **Ivan Snyder** of Super Hero Enterprises. The three of them would buy up our entire print run and sell it exclusively.

Well, it wasn't until June 1977 that the printer finally got around to printing the guts of the FANTASTIC FOUR INDEX. I had taken out a loan to pay him for his materials up front, and for four months I was making payments on the loans without a shred of work out of him. I have no idea what he was doing — he had no other business in his shop than our book. He was probably trying to raise money somewhere to keep his operation afloat. So, all during June, I drove up to his press — every evening — more or less to compel him to get the book printed. That's when I discovered that his press was totally inadequate to produce the books. He owned a hand-fed press that took all evening to print one side of one signature, like a giant Gestetner! Every night, I pulled a finished sheet for myself and saved it. In the back of my mind I knew I had a reason for doing that. When he had finally finished the interior pages, the printer took me into his office and told me that he wanted another $9,000 before he would send the books off to the bindery!

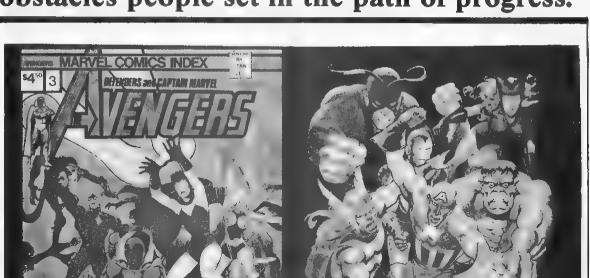
Tony and I had a conference later that evening and he figured out that we could use the printed sheets I'd saved to paste up new boards. We would rephotograph the covers of the comic books, find someone to do the color separations for the cover, and have another printer produce the index.

Our new printer was **Ken Stevens**, owner of Stevens Publishing Company in Astoria, Illinois. He was — and still is — incredibly good to us. He has this gigantic web-offset press — actually **three** of them — and can run off a *complete* volume of around 100 pages — 10,000 copies — in an *afternoon.* And for one-quarter of the

George in San Diego.

Photo: Tony Fratt

obstacles people set in the path of progress."



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Neal Adams and Franc Reyes did the front and back covers, respectively, for MARVEL COMICS INDEX #3.

price that our original printer was charging us! I sent the old printer a finished book so that he could understand that we were through with him.

LOU: *He must have liked that.*

GEORGE: Yeah. We got a bit of revenge. For all I know, he's *still* sitting on 130,000 sheets of unbound FANTASTIC FOUR INDEX. It's small compensation. I'm still paying off the loans I took out to pay his bills.

LOU: *How did you get the Steranko cover away from the guy in Toronto?*

GEORGE: I told him we needed it for the color separations. By the way, we almost took a beating from the color separators, too. **Steranko** kept us from getting ripped off by showing us how to deal with them. He had experience and I had none. I called him after we got back these horrendous color separations, and said, "You know that nice dark blue you put in the background? It now looks like faded blue jeans." (Laughter.) He said, "Don't accept it. Stand your ground, tell them you're not going to pay them a dime until they do it properly." And I stood my ground — for two hours, while the salesman tried to shove those awful separations down my throat. He told me they were the best separations in the world! (Laughter.)

LOU: *This sounds like the hassles the Pinis had with the first issue of ELF QUEST.*

GEORGE: Everybody gets it doing the first couple issues of every publication. You'll get ripped and beaten totally. Everybody take warning: If you publish something, expect to be ripped off unless you're prepared for it. Expect that if the printer sees that you're a novice, he'll just rob you.

LOU: *"We've got a live one!"*

GEORGE: Anyhow, things went pretty well — through our arrangement with Bud and Phil and Super Hero Enterprises, we made enough money almost immediately to cover our printing bills. Tony and I decided to buy our own typesetting equipment and from that point, the indexes rolled out pretty well. We got out INDEX #'s 5,6, 7A and 7B —

LOU: *THOR, STRANGE TALES, THE HULK, SUB-MARINER . . .*

GEORGE: When they started coming out on a reasonable schedule, I began to look south.

LOU: *To San Diego?*

GEORGE: Yes. I wanted to move our operations to the United States, where we had our market. Shipping to the US from Canada, we had to pay Customs.

LOU: *I understand Canada has recently stopped charging duty on printed matter crossing the border.*

GEORGE: Well, that's too late to help us now! It wasn't just paying the duty, it was the delays and other hassles caused by Canadian Customs, a pack of utter dolts given total control over any merchandise crossing the border. I am not exaggerating when I say that *every* INDEX that was printed in the United States was hung up for a week or more in Customs because of some imbecile form or other that wasn't filled out right. You can't really comprehend how dull and stupid people can become until you've confronted a Customs Inspector in full bloom. The Canadian Post Office was another reason for moving operations to the US. Also, I was sick and tired of Toronto winters. It's always cold, always wet, always raining or snowing, I always had some kind of slush underfoot. It wasn't the ideal place to own a motorcycle, and I love motorcycling. I went to the San Diego Con in

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"We were going to set the world on fire!"

1977 and realized, "Gee, this is great! I can see the sun, and there's no frost!"

LOU: *Once you moved to San Diego, everything went well?*

GEORGE: Not exactly. I had lots of trouble collecting payments from one of my distributors, and as a result I wasn't able to pay my printing bills for a long time. Money was extremely tight for a couple of years. This was when I began to set type for a living. I set type for **Steranko**'s MEDIASCENE (now called PREVUE). Eventually, I set six or seven entire issues. Now Tony sets type for him.

LOU: *What was it like to work with Steranko?*

GEORGE: Trying at times. He would often call me at 11 pm long distance to dictate an hour's worth of last-minute corrections and changes for the magazine. This all stems from his totally uncompromising attitude toward his work. He's quite a perfectionist, and probably one of the best graphic designers in the country. He taught me a lot about dealing with the real world, and I have a tremendous amount of respect for him and his talent.

Eventually, I went to Pacific Comics as my exclusive distributor. They had a good enough cash flow that they could absorb all the delays in payments I was encountering trying to sell the books myself. I was able to produce the X-MEN and DAREDEVIL indexes without having to worry where my rent was coming from.

LOU: *You left Pacific Comics — why?*

GEORGE: Mainly because I became overconfident. The next book that I wanted to produce was the *revised* SPIDER-MAN INDEX. I was going to include, besides indexes to all of the Spider-Man comics, an index to MARVEL TEAM-UP and an index to MARVEL TALES. I thought it would take me a year to put it together. I was very wrong!

LOU: *You bit off more than you could chew?*

GEORGE: Not exactly — I bit off more than Pacific Comics could chew! They weren't prepared to wait 18 months for the next book, and it never occurred to me that what I wanted to do would take me so long.

LOU: *You mean, Spider-Man's chronology?*

GEORGE: Yes. Each of my books was more complete than the one that came out before. Part of this completeness was a result of my becoming very familiar with the characters that I was indexing — their histories, in particular. Once most of the Marvel's had been indexed, I could actually look over the whole picture and get a good feel for how characters went from one story into another, how much time stories would take, how much time actually passed in the Marvel Universe since THE FANTASTIC FOUR #1, that kind of thing. You'll note an increasing amount of chronological information in my later books — where characters come from, where they appear next, and so on. I decided that SPIDER-MAN, which would be the first of my revised indexes, would carry a complete, year-by-year chronology of Peter Parker, from high school through graduate school and beyond. This would form the framework against which the other Marvel Comics could be chronologized. All the Marvels take place in the same Universe, and events that happen in one comic in a certain month happened in the background of all the other comics that are issued about the same time — with a small number of exceptions, of course. So I figured out how many years PeterParker really spent in college, and I was able to extrapolate it back to high school and forward into graduate school. It was the most fun I had with comics in years!

Nick Fury, as depicted by Franc Reyes for the contents page of MARVEL COMICS INDEX #6

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LOU: *And . . .?*

GEORGE: Well, you'll be able to read the results when the SPIDER-MAN INDEX finally makes its appearance, as a Marvel publication. The chronology is buried there for anybody who wants to dig deeply enough. The thing you've got to remember when you're going over my work is that, by and large, the chronology of the Marvel Universe is already contained in the comics themselves. Here and there little hints, turns of phrase, offhand comments, when discovered and put together, can be used to build a most convincing and quite consistent chronology. A comment by Peter Parker in SPIDER-MAN #70 that he's at last a sophomore; Halloween and Christmas stories; snow in the backgrounds; that kind of thing. Of course, not *everything* in Marvel's 7000 comics is perfectly consistent! But it's pretty clear when something is real and when it's a topical reference — something that the writer or artist put into the story to give it impact or immediacy. **Tony Mortellaro's** name isn't *really* on all those New York City billboards!

Often the events are exaggerated

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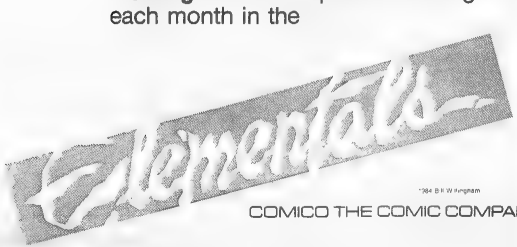

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COMICO THE COMIC COMPANY

"Of course, not *everything* in Marvel's 7000 comics is perfectly consistent."

by the authors. A recent issue of THE THING has the Thing storming into the Marvel Bullpen demanding to know why his encounter with the character Goody Two-Shoes was reported so innaccurately and blown up all out of proportion. He was kinda mad about it: Well, what the Thing was carrying on about is the kind of imperfect reportage that goes on in comics, so what you have to do is read *through* what the author has written, and put the events of the story in some sort of logical structure in relation to all the other events that have happened to that character. That's how you get a chronology.

LOU: *Something like what the Baker Street Irregulars do with Sherlock Holmes?*

GEORGE: Yeah, like that. You have to perform analysis. Unless the comic states specifically what events have taken place in the character's life immediately preceding the story, and where the character will go immediately afterward — which they almost never do — you can't just read a comic and accept at face value that the sequence of stories involving any particular character follows the actual chronology of that character's life and adventures.

You could, for example, attempt to chronologize everything by dates of issue, which is the way most fans start off. I did it this way back in the Fantastic Four Index, trying to fit the Human Torch's appearances in STRANGE TALES into the chronology defined by the issues of THE FANTASTIC FOUR. It was **Dennis Mallonee** who wrote me a series of letters explaining why this was just not enough. He had developed his own chronology of the early Marvel Comics, and his reasoning was simply right on. I eventually published parts of his chronology in COLLECTOR'S DREAM #3 and #5, in the Continuity Conundrums column that he wrote as **Dick O'Malley**. His way of thinking about chronology — namely, that the comics we read are windows onto a separate reality in which the stories take place — made a great deal of sense. The way the story falls in serial order is not the logical order into which the story actually falls. And that logical order is left up to me to determine.

LOU: *So the chronology of the Marvel Universe is your idea of how the stories fall in logical order?*

GEORGE: My idea, yes — but it's not just something I've made up out of whole cloth. It is what I consider to be the best interpretation of what *really* happened in the Marvel Universe, based on all the internal evidence in the stories. Data had to be gathered from over 500 separate comic books in which Spider-Man appears as the feature hero — with more stories appearing each month. Of course, I made things more difficult by wanting to do a *chronology* of the stories, as opposed to merely *indexing* them!

So I have filed all the information for the SPIDER-MAN INDEX — every single appearance of Spider-Man chronologized, with the exception of the most recent issues — and Marvel Comics is going to publish it.

LOU: *What is the new format?*

GEORGE: Each major index will appear as a series of comic-sized books, on Baxter paper, with the cover illustrations in full color. So there will be an OFFICIAL MARVEL COMICS INDEX TO SPIDER-MAN, an OFFICIAL MARVEL COMICS INDEX TO THOR, and so on, each with its own #1 issue, and each maintained by annual updates.

LOU: *Sort of like the MARVEL HANDBOOK project?*

GEORGE: Very much so.

And every so often we might slip in a one-shot, like the COMPLETE INDEX TO SPIDER-WOMAN, which I've finished and have ready to go. These indexes will have a long shelf life because the information isn't going to change much. And we'll have annual updates, just to keep them current.

LOU: *Sounds like a good idea.*

GEORGE: The readers will love it too, because it'll be inexpensive, about $1.50 a book. You won't have to spend so much all at once — you can pick it up in little bite-sized pieces.

LOU: *What about the glorious Timely*

George co-scripted ARIK KHAN #2 with Ron Van Lecuwen.

Art by series creator Franc Reyes.

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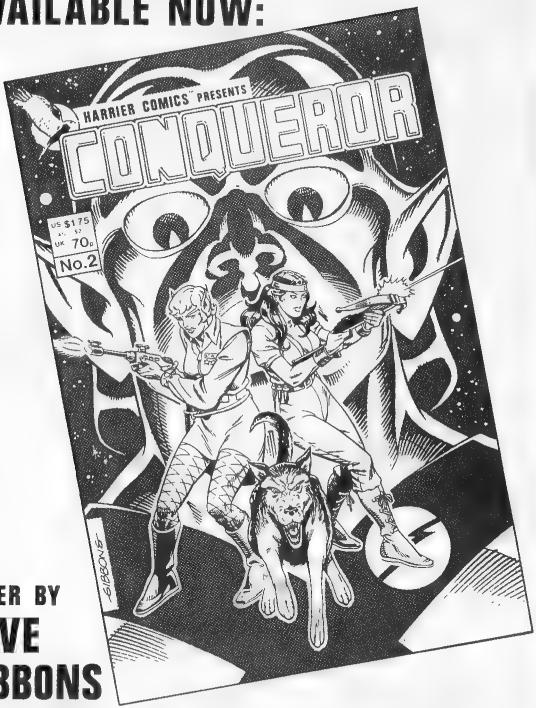

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"You can't accept a comic at face value."

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A wraparound Jim Steranko montage graced the covers of MARVEL COMICS INDEX #8A.

project that was advertised so many years back — an index to all the Timely books?

GEORGE: It's in limbo, but not permanently. At least, I *hope* it isn't permanently. I'm still interested in doing it, and I'm one of the very few people on this planet who has all the Timelys.

LOU: *You may be the only one.*

GEORGE: Well, I've heard that a friend of mine finally has them all, too.

LOU: *A pretender to the throne.*

GEORGE: It's a challenge. It took me eight years.

LOU: *I saw one issue of a Canadian comic, ARIK KHAN, that you scripted. Was that the only one you did?*

GEORGE: Yes. I scripted an issue from a plot thought up by **Rou Van Leeuwen,** owner of the Silver Snail comics shop in Toronto. The character himself was a barbarian thought up by **Franc Reyes,** a Filipino artist who didn't have very good command of English. **Franc Reyes'** art is simply great. He did a lot of art for Tony and me on the indexes and our fanzines. We got interested enough to start thinking about a twenty-issue series, when Franc disappeared. I have no idea where he is now.

LOU: *In my opinion, your fanzine COLLECTOR'S DREAM was one of the best to come out in the late 1970s. Why did it last only five issues?*

GEORGE: It died because it was understaffed! It was only Tony and me, and we were working on all parts of our other projects, such as the INDEX. My heart definitely is in the INDEX, where it is not in the fanzines, of which there are plenty right now. I like THE BUYER'S GUIDE's new format, and I've bought THE COMICS JOURNAL regularly for years. I also like the new fanzine format, comic-size, pioneered by THE COMIC READER and used by AMAZING HEROES and COMICS INTERVIEW. I see no reason to publish any more fanzines, as comic fandom is well served by the ones that exist now.

LOU: *So your heart's in the INDEXES?*

GEORGE: Well, that and the OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE.

LOU: *Oh, my God — not another project!*

GEORGE: Each issue would highlight the events of a certain segment of Marvel Universe time. The first book would deal with the early days of the Fantastic Four, the Hulk, Spider-Man, the X-Men, the Avengers; then the second book would carry on for another span of time, and so on until we reached some current event, such as the Secret War. Then other books could study the remote past of the Marvel Universe, and the several different possible futures.

LOU: *This is going to appear in 1985?*

GEORGE: I've already started to make a giant master chart of the events in the Marvel Universe, and as I go over the indexes to all the other Marvels, I will add more data to the master chart. When there is enough data in the chart to produce a few issues of the HISTORY, we'll start putting the thing together.

LOU: *How did you get involved with such an important project?*

GEORGE: It took me by surprise. I approached Marvel with the idea of *their* publishing the MARVEL COMICS INDEX. **Jim Shooter** responded by asking me, "How would you like to do the MARVEL HISTORY project along with the INDEX?" Immediately, I noted that he said "along with" and not "instead of"! So I said, "Sure, I'd love it." That's how he got me into the project. Now all we have to do is figure out what we're going to put in all those books! (Laughter.)

Merry Christmas, Dal... wherever you are!

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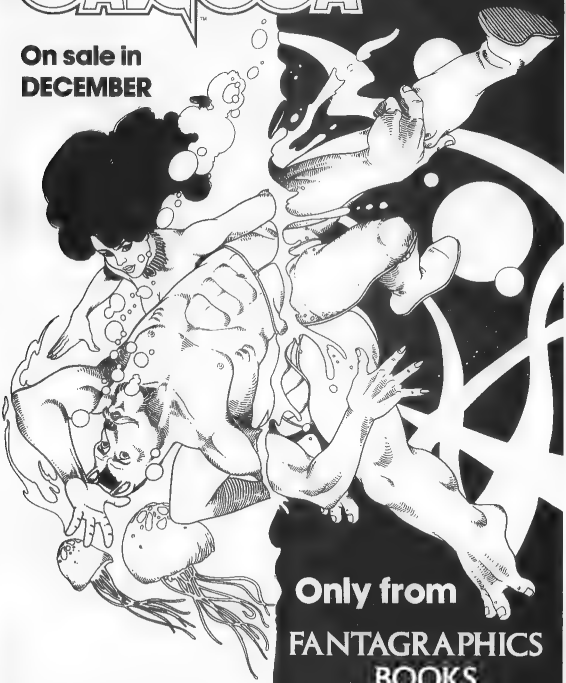

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LAST WORD

Comics Interview 234 Fifth Ave. Suite 301 New York, NY 10001

WHAT WAS RALPH'S REACTION?

DAK —

Let me start by saying that COMICS INTERVIEW is my favorite magazine to pick up every month, and is well worth $2.25 and more. Issue #12 is the first I've read all the way through without skipping any stuff.

The interview with **Alan Moore** was enjoyable. He has helped SWAMP THING beat out TEEN TITANS on my must-buy-first list. Steve and John certainly help out, but **Mr. Moore** has made SWAMP THING *the* horrifying book on the stands, though TWISTED TALES isn't really that horrifying, anyway. I now plan to go out and buy as many back issues of WARRIOR (bang, bang) as I can find. Did he really kill off Captain Britain?

To me, **Jose Luis Garcia Lopez's** art never seemed that good before. I got a closer look recently and now I think it's really nice. The interview was more interesting than I thought it would be.

I don't know a lot about **Jack Davis**, but I do like his art. I find it humorous, regardless of whatever is in the picture. I especially liked his Superman drawing in SUPES #400.

The interview with **Tom Orzechowski** was what I have been waiting for a long time. For one, I've had hopes of one day being a letterer, and he helped clear things up and, two, I've wondered who **Cody** was since I first saw his work (in CAPTAIN CARROT, I think). I thought it was a fake name for Tom, since I once saw "Orzecody" credited.

I don't really have anything to say about the **Louise Simonson** interview, except for one questions: What was Ralph's reaction?

I've grown up on **Mister Rogers**, since for as long as I can remember my brother has watched it — and now my baby sister watches it, too. I figure he must be God's gift to children, because he is so honest with them, and the way he acts on TV is how he really is in real life. Throughout the interview, I could really hear his voice in my mind.

Thank you for putting out such a fine publication.

Mike Grabowski
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MID-OHIO-CON AWARD!

Dear Mr. Kraft:

On Thursday, July 12, 1984, the North Central Ohio Chapter of the March of Dimes held its annual awards dinner. At that dinner we were pleased to honor COMICS INTERVIEW for the generous support given to our Mid-Ohio-Con.

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DOUG MOENCH'S UNKIND ATTITUDE

Dear Dave,

I've been told, on more than one occasion, that I am entirely too reasonable a soul to be working in comics...and, every now and then, I almost believe that.

Case-in-point: **Doug Moench's** somewhat unkind attitude toward me, as expressed in COMICS INTERVIEW #11. Let's face it, Doug did me no favors by not actually mentioning my name. I'm

Garcia Lopez art from the DC STYLE GUIDE.

© 1982 DC Comics, Inc.

sure most of your readers knew exactly who he was talking about.

I'm not a fan of letter column debate, so I'll simply make my side of the "argument" clear and leave it at that. Once is easily my limit for this sort of nonsense.

First off, when I was asked by **Denny O'Neil** to write an issue or two of MOON KNIGHT, I requested that, before actually accepting the assignment, I be given an opportunity to call Doug. I didn't need Doug's *approval* to write Moon Knight, as that character *does* belong to Marvel Comics, but I wanted to make sure that I wouldn't be crossing a "picket line" in accepting the assignment. I wanted to make sure that Doug had walked off the title on his own and had no intention of reconciling with Marvel. I may be many things, my friend, but a *scab* surely isn't one of them. Denny, gentleman that he is, honored my request...while stating his opinion that it was a foolishness on my part. In retrospect, he was probably dead on target with that one.

Moon Knight as drawn by Bill Sienkiewicz.

© 1982 MCG

Once we get past Doug's misconception of why I called him, I have no quibble with his recollection of what *he* said. The fanzine that Doug then misquotes me from was — surprise! — COMICS INTERVIEW #4. I said:

"I am doing these two books, but I don't know if I am going to be the regular writer on the book or not, but I think people will find in these two issues that there are some needed improvements being made to the character. Without violating what has gone before, because that is something I will not do. MOON KNIGHT was created by **Doug Moench** and I will be faithful to his version, without trying to imitate his version."

I do regret the "needed improvements" line. As stated earlier in the interview, I had been working since four the morning of this taping...actually the morning *be-*

DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S COMICS INTERVIEW

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fore since it was sometime after midnight when **Jim Salicrup** and I started our conversation. I probably could have expressed myself better. As it was, I think I expressed a sincere appreciation of Doug's Moon Knight work. And, as a reading of the two issues I wrote will show, I *acted* upon my high regard for the source material.

My "necessary improvements" consisted largely of restoring to the book some of the really nice things Doug had neglected of late. I attempted to show all three of MK's secret identities in "Primal Scream" and also show why they combined to become Moon Knight. I brought back most of the supporting cast, spotlighting Gena in the aforementioned story. I tried an offbeat experiment — something Doug and **Bill Sienkiewicz** had done often and usually successfully — with "Scorecard." Finally, in "Second Wind," I resolved (or, more correctly, *thought* I resolved) the question of who MK wanted to be and who he *would* be, something that had been building in the title almost from the very beginning of its run. After all, I wanted to justify the $1 price tag on that special issue.

Yes, I did guest-star the X-Men and the Fantastic Four. When I told Denny that the villainess of "Second Wind" was a mutant, he suggested using the X-Men. Since I thought it was a good idea, on rare occasions, to let the readers know that MK was, indeed, part of the Marvel Universe, I readily agreed. Besides, I think the X-Men have squatter's rights on all mutants anyway.

I thought it would be a nice twist to have MK call in the Fantastic Four as back-ups in case he couldn't handle the villainess. Why should the hero *always* play fair?

Truth to tell, the most major change I initiated in these two issues was deep-sixing Jean-Paul's offensive accent. That kind of instant (and shoddy) characterization is, or should be, passe.

Did I have other "changes" in mind? Of course, I did. What on Earth did Doug expect I would do: ape his work endlessly? But, for what it's worth, every "change" I contemplated was intended to keep a solid creation as fresh as when Doug, Bill, and Denny first re-established him in MOON KNIGHT #1.

As it turns out, Denny chose to assign MOON KNIGHT to another writer, **Alan Zelenetz.** I think he made the right decision. Denny wanted to change the book drastically and I don't think I could have followed through on those changes. I liked what Doug had set down too much. On being informed of Denny's choice, I wished (through assistant editor **Linda Grant**) Alan the best of luck on his new assignment.

I suspect that what *really* has Doug burned here is the insinuation that his work was not (and is not) perfect. Nobody's work is. But, because we are creative writers, we keep working at it. And one of my own strongest-held beliefs is that change is an *essential* part of creativity.

Of course, what really has *me* burned is Dough's uncharitable response to my act of, I thought, common courtesy. But, with this admittedly long-winded reply, I relegate the whole matter to some soon-to-be-forgotten file folder. My continued good wishes to you, to COMICS INTERVIEW, and, especially, to **Doug Moench.**

Tony Isabella
COSMIC COMICS
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Cleveland, OH 44115

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From the Warren Reece collection of Marvel Comics.

MORE GOLDEN AGE GREATS

Dear Dave:

Just a few — belated — words on COMICS INTERVIEW #9. I know **Simonson** is hot — and he did a nice cover — but I nearly passed up the issue (**Simonson** overdose) until, leafing through it in the store, I noticed the **Joe Kubert** interview. Even more, I was doubly surprised to see the **Gardner Fox** piece. The cover is intended to sell the issue, and should give a hint of some of the other stuff inside.

Speaking of **Fox**, I felt the interview was too short. Too many things were just touched upon, and not really discussed. More about working with **Julie Schwartz** or the many artists; what relationship did he have with the other stable writers like

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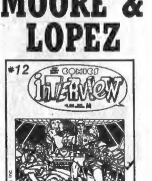
MOORE & LOPEZ



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Broome, Binder, Kanigher? Especially in light of the failed unionization attempt a few years ago, more about the aborted attempt that resulted in a lot of longtime staffers being booted out of DC would have been appreciated.

The eclectic nature of the magazine is a definite plus. Nice to see **Warren Reece** making good — I remember him back in Brooklyn College more than ten years ago (how time flies) mounting an exhibit of his Timelys in the Student Union Building at a time when such books were very rare to come by.

Basically, keep up the good work, but more Golden Age greats would be appreciated to balance this week's superstar.

Paul A. Zuckerman
1289 E 19th Street
Brooklyn, NY 11230

You're right, Paul, the cover should indeed indicate some of the interviews offered within — and as you've no doubt noticed, usually does. Since # 9 was a very special issue, we wanted to make it stand out and look different, which is why we went for the simple, dramatic look. But after all, Paul, by now we expect regular readers such as yourself to realize that we offer a potpourri of comics people in each and every issue, and that there's always plenty of interest for all comics enthusiasts. We're glad you leafed through the issue and discovered this for yourself, and hope that in the future when you see a new issue of COMICS INTERVIEW, you'll trust us to bring you the best inside-the-industry coverage no matter what is — or isn't — on the cover.

After all, that's what we're here for, Paul!

— DAK

INCREASE IN SALES!

Dear Lesley,

Hope that things are gong well. The magazine is superb (as I'm sure you can tell by the increase in sales) and you're all doing a great job. We're still hanging in there, too.

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NEXT ISSUE: Because you demanded it — **THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES!** Writer — and DC Vice-President — ***Paul Levitz***, and new LSH artist ***Dan Jurgens***, talk about the most colossal congregation of champions in the cosmos! Plus: DOCTOR WHO artist ***Dave Gibbons*** tells why he left GREEN LANTERN! DOOM PATROL creator and former X-MEN writer ***Arnold Drake*** rattles some skeletons in the DC closet! With a lollapalooza LEGION cover by ***Dan Jurgens!*** Don't miss COMICS INTERVIEW #16!

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